



THE ROUND WORLD SERIES



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

THE ROUND WORLD SERIES

THE FULL STATURE OF A MAN. By Julian Warth.

GRAFENBURG PEOPLE. By Reuen Thomas.

THE RUSTY LINCHPIN AND LUBOFF ARCHIPOVNA.

By Mme. Kokhanovsky.

THE ROMANCE OF A LETTER. By Lowell Choate.

DOROTHY THORNE. By Julian Warth.

THE
ROMANCE OF A LETTER

BY
LOWELL CHOATE

BOSTON
D LOTHROP COMPANY
FRANKLIN AND HAWLEY STREETS

COPYRIGHT, 1887,
BY
D LOTHROP COMPANY

TO ANNIE,
MY EARLY FRIEND AND COUNSELOR, THIS WORK
IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED BY
The Author

2134747



CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
CHAPTER I.	
A PEEP AT NEWBURY PARSONAGE	7
CHAPTER II.	
JESSIE IN BOSTON	21
CHAPTER III.	
A MUDDY ADVENTURE.	34
CHAPTER IV.	
THE LETTER.	53
CHAPTER V.	
MISS NORBERRY'S MISTAKE	69
CHAPTER VI.	
A SUCCESSFUL PRESCRIPTION	83
CHAPTER VII.	
BY CHANCE, THE USUAL WAY	102
CHAPTER VIII.	
JESSIE RENEWS HER PROMISE	109
CHAPTER IX.	
NEARLY A DENOUEMENT	115
CHAPTER X.	
A NEW LEAF TURNED	134
CHAPTER XI.	
THWARTED PURPOSES	144
CHAPTER XII.	
PICTURES IN THE FIRE	154
CHAPTER XIII.	
THE DOCTOR'S AVOWAL	164

	PAGE.
CHAPTER XIV.	
MISS NORBERRY'S STRATAGEM	174
CHAPTER XV.	
DOWN RIVER	184
CHAPTER XVI.	
MISS NORBERRY'S REPENTANCE	211
CHAPTER XVII.	
JESSIE'S DILEMMA	221
CHAPTER XVIII.	
A NIGHT JOURNEY	238
CHAPTER XIX.	
REVELATIONS	245
CHAPTER XX.	
WESTWARD BOUND	257
CHAPTER XXI.	
SURRENDER	276
CHAPTER XXII.	
READING THE LETTER	296
CHAPTER XXIII.	
DOCTOR FORNEY AT HOME	308
CHAPTER XXIV.	
ONE TOO MANY	314
CHAPTER XXV.	
MISS NORBERRY'S LESSON	327
CHAPTER XXVI.	
RELEASE	338
CHAPTER XXVII.	
WAITING	344

THE ROMANCE OF A LETTER.

CHAPTER I.

A PEEP AT NEWBURY PARSONAGE.

HIS serene Highness has come, Aunty, and I have had the honor of showing him to his room. When his High Mightiness is ready, I suppose you will be allowed to welcome your guest, the great Doctor Forney."

"Is he so very formidable?" Mrs. Norberry smilingly asked.

"Oh ! perhaps he has only a proper appreciation of himself," was Jessie's rejoinder.

"So he has come. I do not see why I did not hear the bell," mused Mrs. Norberry, at a loss to understand how this guest could have entered her house, and be already receiving its hospitalities ere she was even aware of his arrival.

"He did not ring at all, for I reached home

just as the carriage drove up which brought him from the station," said Jessie. "Of course I knew at once who he was, but he introduced himself with due formality: so august a personage must not for a moment be mistaken for any one else."

Mrs. Norberry smiled at this assumption of dudgeon on the part of her high-spirited niece, gently reminding her that first impressions are not always trustworthy.

"I am sure, Aunt, if you had seen him drop his valise the moment he got into the house, you would have been impressed, as I was, with the impropriety of such a magnate carrying his own baggage," was the girl's laughing response.

"Then when I offered to show him his room (which, by the way, he asked for at once, as if the house had been a public hostelry) he looked at his valise, and then all about as if expecting a servant should be in waiting in every corner. I was on the point of proposing to take it up for him when he did condescend to do this service for himself. But I am sure it hurt his dignity not a little."

The slightly remonstrative exclamation, "O, Jessie!" had escaped her aunt's lips while she was speaking, and that lady now said, "You should

not judge any one so hastily, dear. Doctor Forney is probably unused to so simple a *menage* as ours ; and you know the force of habit is very strong, even with the best of people. When he consented to come here and deliver the lecture to-night, your uncle took it as a great courtesy, for it is not often the doctor favors a small town like ours in this way ; and we feel very desirous of making his short stay with us a pleasant one. So you and I will go down at-once, that we may be ready to receive him when he leaves his room." Saying which Mrs. Norberry arose, folded away the work upon which she had been engaged, smoothed her hair and collar which baby arms had rumped, but not till she was quitting the room did she notice that Jessie had seated herself by the cradle, where, with her head in a book, she had evidently forgotten the guest whose claims upon their courteous hospitality she had just been urging.

"Are you not coming down with me, dear?" she asked, pausing on the threshold.

"I beg to be excused, Aunty ; I really must have time to fortify myself before another meeting with the grand Mogul," returned Jessie, with a slightly impatient shrug of the shoulders.

"But what excuse can I make for you, child? He will be sure to inquire."

"O, no! he won't. He took me for the nurse-maid," interposed Jessie. "Do not fear that he will inquire for so humble an individual. Aunt Helen will be home in a few minutes now, and I will send her down to help you entertain him. She is always in her element with great people, while they overshadow poor me."

Mrs. Norberry was evidently satisfied of the uselessness of trying to change her niece's decision, for she said no more, but went to welcome her guest whose step on the landing she now heard.

This lady had not been for ten years the wife of a country minister without knowing what it was to extend the hospitalities of her house to those who were entire strangers to herself, as in the present instance; for she had never met Doctor Forney, though his name was a familiar one, both from hearing her husband speak of him, and through his reputation on the lecture platform.

"Jessie, are you trying to waken Bertie that you are rolling him over in that manner? How many times have I told you that it is a bad practice to rock a sleeping child."

"O, Aunt Helen! I'm glad you've come, for Doctor Forney is here, and Aunt Kitty wants you to come down and help her entertain him. Here, I will take your things," Jessie added, hoping thereby to expedite her aunt's movements.

"So he has come. I supposed he would be here by this time. Well, I will remain with Bertie, and you may go down and assist your Aunt Kitty to entertain him," was Miss Norberry's reply as she seated herself in an easy chair, and began leisurely to divest herself of her outside wraps.

"I? Why, I don't know him at all; and Aunt Kitty expects you, for I promised to send you to her relief just as soon as you came in," cried Jessie, with smiling audacity, which, however, did not veil the concern she felt lest her aunt should decide not to be sent.

Helen Norberry was the Rev. John Norberry's maiden sister, a lady of forty-five or thereabouts, but a still fresh and handsome woman. For the last five years, or since her mother's death which had broken up her home in Boston, she had lived with her brother.

But "Aunt Helen," as the children called her, was far from being the typical maiden aunt who

could be called upon to do all sorts of disagreeable things which no one else cared to be troubled with. Not at all ; there was nothing of your humble servant about her, and no one but her orphan niece, Jessie, with whom it was the purest sarcasm, ever presumed to lay commands upon her. For Helen Norberry's strongest characteristic was her dominant will : she was a born ruler, though had it not been for this niece whom she had brought up, her powers apparently would have had but little play.

Loving Jessie with a single-heartedness rarely found outside of mother-love, and feeling no little pride in her beauty, wit and accomplishments, she yet allowed her no free will of her own, but disputed the girl's every independent action.

"Of course you will go down. I insist upon it. It is not every day you have the opportunity of meeting so learned and elegant a man as the doctor. I am surprised that you do not better appreciate the chance of making such an acquaintance. Besides, you owe it to your —"

Miss Norberry's sentence was not finished, for she had raised her voice in speaking, and a pair of bright eyes had suddenly opened in the cradle. The wail which followed was apparently a protest

against the disturbance of the peace which had reigned before this lady's entrance.

Bertie's cries happily proved a diversion, and saved Jessie from an ignominious defeat; for when her Aunt Helen asserted her authority, experience had taught Jessie that she had no will of her own: she was not a free agent.

All Miss Norberry's efforts to soothe the young autocrat whose slumbers she had so ruthlessly invaded, were unavailing; nor did the nursery cease to echo to the child's cries till she had yielded him to Jessie's arms, and left the room, vanquished for once on her own battle-ground when just on the eve of victory.

"Hush, darling! Jessie will stay with you," were words that seemed to have a magical effect on the turbulent spirit they sought to soothe, and as the child nestled quietly into her arms, Jessie may be excused the momentary light of triumph which shone in her eyes.

Half an hour later when she entered the dining-room in answer to the summons of the tea-bell, a pair of baby arms were still clasped tightly about her neck, while a little rosy cheek was in close proximity to her own.

"Doctor, let me make you acquainted with my niece, Jessie Norberry, my brother Allan's daughter," her uncle said by way of introducing her to their guest, who was just taking his seat at table.

"Ah! Is it possible? Allan Norberry's daughter? Miss Jessie, I am very happy to meet you," said the doctor, with impressive earnestness, giving the hand she extended to him a grasp so hearty and lingering as to annoy her.

This very pronounced recognition, now that he knew who she was, piqued Jessie's resentment.

"I had the pleasure of receiving Doctor Forney when he came this afternoon," she said, with a mischievous light in her eye which boded no good to him who had provoked it. After the brief glance which she had given the doctor as her uncle introduced her to him, all her attention was bestowed upon Bertie, whose clinging arms she found hard to unloose when she would have placed him in his chair.

Being something of an adept in human nature, the doctor interpreted aright the glance of half-scornful indifference on the bright, piquant face which met his for a moment; and he would perhaps have thought no more about it, since it was

not his habit to court the favor or smiles of women ; but for certain reasons he determined to be friends with Jessie Norberry, even though she might not herself have so ordained.

The conversation during the meal turned entirely upon the event of the evening, and Jessie happily found herself left out of it, while her uncle and the doctor discussed details.

On rising from the table Jessie thought to escape at once from the room, and the notice of their visitor ; but she found herself unable to resist Bertie's appeal that he should go too, and before she had freed the child from his chair, the doctor came over to her and held out his hand.

"I did not know that it was Allan Norberry's daughter who welcomed me this afternoon," he said, as if deprecating her pardon for his ignorance. "Your father, Miss Jessie, was my kindest and best friend. His daughter will not refuse me her trust and confidence?"

A pair of soft brown eyes were quickly lifted to the doctor's face, and a sweet, tremulous voice said :

"I beg pardon. I did not know you were papa's friend. To have been his friend is the surest

passport to his daughter's favor." Jessie did not notice that her aunt had quietly taken Bertie away, as with regained self-possession she added, — "I am always happy to meet any one who knew papa; for I remember so little of him myself." A few moments later she was listening with rapt attention to their visitor's account of his first meeting with her father.

"It was in the fall of 18—; I remember the day perfectly: fifteen years ago, though it does not seem so long as that," said the doctor thoughtfully.

"I had gone abroad to continue my studies after completing my university course, and among other letters of introduction given me by friends at home, was one to your father. I met him at Brunn, and we were together on the Continent four months. He was then compiling his great historical work, and I had a good opportunity to learn something of his literary methods, as well as the extent of his researches. Nothing seemed to escape his observation, and his clear insight and mental grasp of every subject to which he gave his thought, made him a royal companion and friend.

“The few months I spent with Allan Norberry gave my mind its greatest stimulus, and whatever I have accomplished since, I owe in a large measure to his advice and encouragement. It was just at that time in my life when the temptation was great to throw off a studious habit, and find in travel only the change and amusement to which a thoroughly indolent temperament exposed me.

“So you see, Miss Jessie, I have good reason to remember such a friend, and to find pleasure in meeting his daughter, who, for her honored father’s sake, must hold a high place in my regard.”

“You are very kind, and I shall never forget that you were papa’s friend. I am constantly meeting people who seem to have known him better than I, his child, did,” was Jessie’s naive reply. At this moment her uncle entered the room, and their conversation was interrupted.

Jessie had lost her mother when a mere babe, and her father’s profession had kept him most of the time abroad. She had now and then caught brief glimpses of him when his work had brought him home, but so seldom and short had these visits been as hardly to establish a connection in her childish mind.

"Why was Fate so cruel as to rob me of my father before I learned to know him?" had been her lament for the last three years. That she had not really known him she first realized when the news of his death reached her. And now it was not only his loss that she mourned, but the years which had parted them.

The lecture delivered by Doctor Forney before the Newbury Lyceum was long remembered by those who heard it. The speaker's graceful oratory and polished rhetoric probably added not a little to its effect upon his audience ; but his theme had been happily chosen, and in paying his own tribute to "The men whom our country should honor," the doctor proved that though he might not be entirely destitute of the egotism natural to one so popular and petted as himself, he could still appreciate the virtues and talents of others.

The graceful and tender tribute that night publicly paid her father's memory, Jessie Norberry would never forget ; nor would she ever again think otherwise than kindly of the man who held him in such grateful remembrance.

In walking home that evening through the elm-shaded streets of old Newbury with the doctor for

her escort, Jessie was moved to tell him what a rare intellectual treat his lecture had been to herself, and to thank him for the kind and appreciative words he had spoken of her dead father.

"I wish I could make you understand, Miss Jessie, what an inspiration his grand, noble character was to me," the doctor returned, and then was silent.

After this neither spoke for several moments; Jessie could not trust herself to do so, and the doctor seemed absorbed in thought.

When the silence was broken between them it was by his asking how long she had been living in Newbury.

"Since I left school two years ago," was Jessie's brief rejoinder. She was hoping that the doctor would go on to particularize in regard to her father's work; for anything connected with this subject had a rare fascination for her; but he did not, and presently the conversation drifted into a different channel.

The doctor proved himself to be well up in the annals of the historic old town, and his evident interest in it prompted Jessie to telling him incidents both humorous and pathetic, of its inhabi-

tants, till she forgot that her companion was the august Doctor Forney, and found herself talking with him quite as if he were an old friend.

“Aunty was right: ‘First impressions are not always reliable,’ and I will not be so hasty in judging any one again,” was her thought as she laid her head upon her pillow that night, feeling herself richer in the friendship of the man whom a few hours before she had (in thought, at least) dubbed a selfish egotist.

CHAPTER II.

JESSIE IN BOSTON.

BOSTON COMMON was in all the glory of its October coloring a few weeks later, when Jessie found herself, one bright morning, on the familiar mall which she had traversed daily for a number of years on her way to and from school. It seemed as if the same nursemaids and babies were out for their airing, and the identical boys tearing down the mall with a "Hip, hurrah!" as in the old days. There at least was the very same apple woman where she had used to stop, and for her pennies pick the reddest fruit on the old woman's stand, and whom she now passed with a cheery "Good-morning!"

"Everybody is in just the same old hurry. One's blood does circulate faster where there is so much going on," was her thought, as the charm of the great stirring city made itself felt in her pulses and her quickened step.

"Good-morning, Miss Jessie! This is a sur-

prise." It was Doctor Forney who spoke, his face alight with pleasure as he grasped the hand Jessie extended to him.

"I am ever so glad to meet you, Doctor, for I have hardly seen a familiar face this morning," was the frank return.

While relieving her of her hand-bag and parcels, the doctor inquired for her Newbury friends, and how long she had been in the city.

"I came up yesterday, on a shopping trip, and have been running about all the morning trying to match some lace for Aunt Helen. I expect she will be in despair when I tell her that Brussels point is *passee*, and that thread only is *au fait*." Despite her gay tone, a shade of annoyance crossed Jessie's face when she remembered her non-success in this errand.

"If you are trying to find old lace you should have my sister Harriet with you; she has a wonderful faculty for unearthing all such relics," was the doctor's smiling rejoinder.

"I wish she had been with me this morning, then, to at least have defended my poor sample from the contemptuous glances it has met from shopmen. One would think that old-fashioned

lace had been tabooed by good society," said Jessie, with piquant earnestness.

The doctor laughed, and suggested that perhaps her aunt might find existence possible without Brussels point, inquired for that lady's health, spoke of his pleasant visit at the parsonage, and then casually mentioned the fact that he was on his way to Music Hall to procure tickets for the concert that afternoon.

"Why, that is just where I am going, but I am sure I should have forgotten it. The box office was not open when I came by this morning, so I left buying my tickets till I got through with my shopping. I am visiting my Aunt Wilson," Jessie continued, "and she is to go with me to the concert, so I hope I have not put off getting my tickets till the best seats are all gone. Aunty's lace has driven everything else out of my mind."

"No, I think we shall be in season," returned the doctor; but they quickened their pace, which had been a leisurely one.

The doctor was right, for on making application for tickets he secured four seats in the best part of the house, congratulating himself on being able to get them together, as he wished Jessie to meet

his sister, who would be with him. This settled, the doctor proposed that Jessie should go with him to see a picture which was then on exhibition at one of the studios. "It is one of the greatest pictures of the day, and you must not miss seeing it," he said, with the enthusiasm of a connoisseur in such matters.

When they reached the gallery, it so happened that the artist himself was there, and as he was a personal friend of the doctor's Jessie had the pleasure of an introduction to one of the famous men of the day, as well as the satisfaction of hearing from his own lips such a description of his picture as only an artist can give.

"I have a fancy," said Jessie, when she and the doctor had again reached the street, "that a great picture, or any other great work, has been the growth of generations. I am sure that Mr. J.'s ancestors must have been painters, even though they may not have touched brush to canvas; their love and appreciation of the beautiful has at last found a full expression through him."

"You may be right, Miss Jessie, and if so we probably jostle in our every-day walk more than one 'mute inglorious Milton,' whose songs are

growing for posterity, and whose lips in the fullness of time will be unsealed. Not an unpleasant thought," continued the doctor, "since it holds out the hope of immortality to all creative, aspiring souls."

"Yes; and that there are so many such souls who spend the brief space allotted them here striving to work out their high ideals, and who never—in Time, at least—see their conceptions fulfilled, is, I think, but a proof that my theory is correct," returned Jessie, "else why is it that the longing to achieve something so possesses humanity?"

The doctor felt he had never realized the beauty and pathos of brown eyes until he met the pair now raised to his face.

"May not the answer to your question lie in the fact that humanity is made in the likeness of the great Creator?" he asked, with a kindly smile.

"Yes; it must be so," was the thoughtful response. "And perfect as He made His work, so that He Himself said that it was good, He has still left something for His children to achieve."

A moment later they had reached Mrs. Wilson's door, where the doctor took leave of Jessie, de-

clining her invitation to go in and see her aunt, as he had the prospect of so soon making that lady's acquaintance.

"A sweet, interesting girl, worthy to be her father's daughter," was the doctor's thought as he kept on his way.

Mrs. Wilson was Jessie's sole living relative on the maternal side, and the last three years, while in Boston attending school, she had lived with this aunt; so the old West End house was quite as much home to her as the parsonage at Newbury.

Mrs. Wilson, who was a widow, and a confirmed invalid, had become very much attached to her bright, lively niece, and would have gladly kept her after she left school; but her uncle, John Norberry, who was her guardian, had not so willed; for the constant society of a sick and nervous woman, he felt was unsuited to a nature as sensitive as Jessie's, so, on leaving school, she had gone to Newbury.

This change had been a welcome one to the girl, for during certain vacations spent at the parsonage she had become very fond of her gentle Aunt Kitty, and the wide-awake cousins, Allan and Roger, who made life at the parsonage a perpetual

holiday to her after her Aunt Wilson's quiet, stately home.

But we left Jessie standing at this relative's door. She had that morning, greatly to her surprise, succeeded in gaining her aunt's consent to attend the concert, for which she had since obtained tickets. But Mrs. Wilson had made the proviso that she should not stay through the performance if she found it too much for her.

"Oh! but you will not, Aunty; who ever heard of one of Thomas' concerts being too much? That is not an ill to which either flesh or spirit is heir," had been the girl's cheery rejoinder.

But on reaching home Jessie found her aunt not a little depressed in contemplation of what she had promised to undergo.

"I don't know how I am to stand the fatigue: I was certainly crazy to think of such a thing as going to a concert. Here I have not been out of the house for weeks, and I don't know when I have sat up three hours at a time," she said, with the querulousness natural to one weakened by inaction and confinement, rather than disease.

It took all Jessie's powers of persuasion to keep her aunt up to her promise, for her weak nerves

proved unequal even to the work of dressing, and when the carriage was announced she declared herself unable to sit up. But nevertheless two hours later she was leaving Music Hall with the crowd, apparently none the worse for the further fatigue she had endured.

Jessie had found the doctor's sister a delightfully bright and cheery little body. With much womanly grace and sweetness, there was in Harriet Forney the simplicity and freshness of the child. While she and Jessie were making rapid strides toward an acquaintance in their exit from the hall, the doctor was piloting Mrs. Wilson through the crowd to her carriage.

"I would like to know who that man is. I saw him in the hall this afternoon; his face is familiar, but I cannot place him." Doctor Forney was standing beside the carriage, talking with Jessie, while waiting for her aunt to take leave of friends who had pressed forward to speak with her.

Jessie turned as the doctor spoke, and saw a gentleman who was well known to her, coming down Winter Place; the next moment he had also seen her, and, with a courteous gesture, raised his hat.

"Ah! an acquaintance?" the doctor said, having seen the recognition.

"Yes; he is one of our Newbury men, Mr. Carrol — Doctor Melville Carrol's son," was Jessie's reply.

"So that is Doctor Carrol's son? He is a splendid specimen of a man, physically," was the doctor's response, following with his eye the receding figure, perfect in proportion, and towering head and shoulders above the crowd.

"Then Doctor Carrol is living in Newbury? He was quite a famous surgeon at one time. What have I heard about him of late? Was it that his health had broken down?"

"Quite likely; for that is the case," returned Jessie. "He was obliged to give up practice on that account, I believe."

"Your beautiful old town must afford him a delightful haven of refuge," was the doctor's next comment.

"I am afraid he has hardly found it that," said Jessie, and then checked herself, for the words had unwittingly slipped from her tongue. Seeing that her companion looked surprised, she added in explanation, —

“Doctor Carrol’s mind has seemed to be affected of late, and his family are very anxious about him, though I think he must be better since his son is here; for Milton Carrol seldom leaves his father.”

While Jessie was speaking, Miss Forney, who had a moment before stepped into a store to execute some small commission, rejoined them, and rallied her brother upon his extended adieus.

The doctor had not noticed that Mrs. Wilson’s friends had left her, but he now gave the order to her coachman, and, with a cordial handshake, was gone.

“I supposed Doctor Forney was an older man,” was Mrs. Wilson’s comment as their carriage turned into Tremont Street, and she caught the last glimpse of the man who had shown her so much courteous attention that afternoon. Then it first occurred to her to ask her niece where she had made the doctor’s acquaintance.

On learning that she had met him in her uncle’s house, Mrs. Wilson evidently felt it was incumbent upon her to further an acquaintance which had the sanction of the girl’s guardian, for she said plainly, —

“I suppose I ought to invite him to dinner

while you are here ; but I don't see how I am to do it with my wretched health."

If her aunt had at the moment proposed a trip to Europe, Jessie would not have been much more surprised than to hear her talk of inviting to dinner a comparative stranger ; for it was very long since old friends, even, had been entertained in this way in the Wilson mansion.

"What made you think of that, Aunt? You are not called upon to do anything of the kind ; besides, I fancy that the doctor is not a diner-out. He strikes me as a man who would hold in contempt the small conventionalities of fashionable life."

"He does not strike me in any such way. The very cut of his coat proclaims him a devotee to fashion, rather than a despiser of it," returned her aunt, regarding her critically. She was wondering whether this seeming indifference on Jessie's part was real or assumed. Did she indeed feel no interest in the distinguished man whose polite attentions had so lately made her the cynosure of all eyes ?

"Oh ! his tailor only is responsible for the cut of his coat. I doubt if Doctor Forney troubles him-

self much about such prosaic matters," was Jessie's laughing rejoinder.

When her aunt spoke, the girl's thoughts had been with the doctor's sister, whose companionship she coveted for the invalid. If she could have the society of a person like Harriet Forney it would be better than any tonic to her weakened nerves.

"I wish you and Miss Forney could become better friends, Aunty. She is such a bright, cheery person. I cannot fancy her ever dull or blue. I don't wonder the doctor calls her his sun-beam. With such a sister to keep his home, it is no wonder he never married."

"You speak as if he were an old man. He can scarcely have seen thirty-five," and Mrs. Wilson added, in the querulous tone which had become habitual to her, "as to his sister, I don't see that she deserves very great praise for being cheerful. Who would not be so with her perfect health?"

Jessie had not lived for months in her aunt's house without learning to understand and humor her moods, and she dropped the subject here.

"I haven't seen you look so bright for a long time as you have this afternoon, Aunty; perhaps you shut yourself up too much. It was not so

hard as you thought, after all, was it? At least, you don't feel any worse?"

"You don't know anything about it, child. I haven't been free from pain a moment this afternoon. Of course I felt obliged to keep up," was the invalid's plaintive response, as she sank wearily back among the carriage cushions, apparently remembering for the first time her invalid condition; and Jessie looking out of the window, wondered if an earthquake or any other convulsion of nature could shake her aunt's conviction that it was incumbent upon her to always sustain this character.

CHAPTER III.

A MUDDY ADVENTURE.

ELM BROOK FARM was the home of the Carrols. The place took its name from the noble elm-trees which here shaded for nearly a quarter of a mile, the public highway ; and also from the brook which ran directly through the place.

The house was a large two-story brick one, with an ell and ample outbuildings, while a wide sweep of lawn in front graced the approach from the street.

Five years before our story opens this place had been for sale ; but it was scarcely a month in the market when it was generally known that it had been bought by a retired physician, and a few weeks later Doctor Carrol and his family came to Newbury, strangers to every one in the town, and took possession of the house and acres of Elm Brook Farm.

It was quite apparent from the first that Doctor

Carrol did not care to meet his neighbors, and the impression had soon gone abroad that his object in coming to Newbury was to live a quiet, secluded life. Doubtless his silent, preoccupied manner had given rise to this impression; for he invariably ignored or failed to hear the neighborly salutation which had at first been accorded him; and when he had been two years in Newbury he had scarcely spoken with a dozen persons.

As Elm Brook Farm came within the limits of his parish, John Norberry took occasion soon to call upon the Carrols, notwithstanding that they had not shown themselves at church, and that reports of the doctor's exclusiveness and taciturnity had reached him.

The minister had been unfortunate in timing his first call, for the doctor happened to be out. Mrs. Carrol had received him very cordially, however, and expressed regret that her husband was not at home. She spoke of his disposition to avoid strangers, a tendency which she said he had seemed to develop since coming to Newbury.

The doctor's wife was a lady of fine presence, and evidently possessed no small degree of culture; but there was a certain reserve of speech and

manner that seemed to preclude any degree of familiarity.

On his second call John Norberry again failed to see the doctor, who this time was at home, but excused himself on the plea of not being well. Mrs. Carrol apologized when delivering her husband's message to the minister. He seemed to shrink from seeing all visitors, a fact which she deplored, but attributed entirely to his state of health.

But notwithstanding that five years had now passed, and the minister had frequently met Doctor Carrol in his home, he did not feel that he was really acquainted with him. With the doctor's son, however, it had been quite different, for, before many months had passed, Milton Carrol and the minister had become the best of friends. But while the young man talked with him freely on every other subject, John Norberry could not fail to notice his evident reticence in speaking of his father.

When Milton Carrol first came to Newbury, Rumor said he was just fresh from college, where he had received well-earned laurels; but certain it was he had at once taken hold of farming in such

an earnest and practical way as showed a decided taste for it, if not a previous knowledge.

The young farmers in his neighborhood had for a time held aloof from him, jeering at his fine broadcloth, and air of superiority, while more than one remark came to his ears calculated to annoy him ; but he had gone his way apparently unruffled, treating every one courteously, though seeking intimacy with none.

The purchase of Elm Brook Farm had been made in the fall, and that first winter Milton Carol had taken frequent trips away from Newbury, a fact which had led his neighbors to suppose him fickle, and little calculated for the life of a farmer. But when the spring opened, greatly to their surprise, he had donned working clothes, and gone into the field with his men, where he soon proved that he could lend a hand, as well as direct his work. Now it was generally conceded by his townsmen that there was not a more prosperous, or better managed farm in the county, than Elm Brook.

But in the meantime Rumor had been busy with the doctor's fair name, and many people in Newbury now believed that he had come to this

quiet town to hide disgrace. In housecleaning time Mrs. Carrol had been in the habit of hiring, to help their old servant, a woman who worked in this way in many of the families in Newbury. Unlike some of her class, Mary Manson's veracity was unquestioned; so when she affirmed that all was not as it should be with the doctor, and that, to her knowing, his family were fearful he would divulge something which seemed at times to trouble him greatly, those who listened to her felt she had good ground for making such a statement.

It was singular how soon suspicion was fanned into a flame, and how ready people were to say that the doctor had always seemed to them like a man who was bearing the burden of an unconfessed crime. Now a reason was found for his shunning society, and secluding himself as he had ever since coming among them.

He had broken some law of God and man, and was hiding himself among strangers, in the vain hope that his sin would not find him out.

When these accusations reached Milton Carrol's ears, as they finally did, he was very much disturbed, but insisted that they could only have arisen from words which his father himself had

dropped : for, since his mind had been affected, he had entertained strange, sad fancies about himself.

It was something like a month after Jessie's visit to the city that she one morning informed her Aunt Kitty of her intention to go to Newbury Hill Farm to spend the day. This was at the other end of the town, and fully three miles from the parsonage.

Aunt Judith Lucas, owner and manager of these acres, was very fond of the minister's bright, winsome niece who always brought her a breeze from the outside world, and the good woman's odorous pantries and teeming orchards were always at Jessie's disposal.

"Aunt Judith said she would have some grape juice for me if I came this month, and I have promised Mary Allen a bottle for her mother. Besides, I want to see Aunt Judith, who will wonder what has become of me."

"But how will you get to Newbury Hill, child? Your uncle has gone to Westfield with the buggy, and will not be back before night," was her Aunt Kitty's reply.

"Oh! I shall walk. It will be just fun, such a clear, bracing day. But about getting home — I

had not thought of that." It had just occurred to Jessie that there would not be so much fun walking back laden with the spoils she expected to bring with her.

"If Uncle John cannot come for me to-night, all is I shall have to stay till morning, when James will be coming to town, and will bring me," Jessie added, after a moment's reflection.

"Had you better try to walk?" was her aunt's gentle remonstrance. "The heavy rains we have had lately are sure to have washed out the road in Plover's Gully. To-morrow you can have the buggy."

"I wanted to be at home to-morrow, to help you entertain Miss Molly Westcott and her mother."

"O, yes! I had forgotten they were coming. Mrs. Westcott is sure to feel slighted if neither you nor Aunt Helen are visible."

"Well, Aunty is sure not to show herself downstairs to-morrow," replied Jessie; "so I had better go to Newbury Hill to-day. I really ought not to put off my visit any longer."

Half an hour later Jessie was equipped for her walk in a dark, close-fitting suit, and a pair of stout boots whose soles, she jestingly affirmed, would

allow her to wade dry shod through all the brooks in town.

But Jessie was to prove that it would have been wiser to have taken her aunt's advice, for on reaching Plover's Gully, a low-lying part of the road which crossed a wide piece of marsh, she found that lady's prediction fully verified.

"I did not dream it would be like this; I shall have to go back, after all." It was not till she found herself sinking deeper and deeper at every step, that she came to this sensible resolve, seeing that it would be the veriest folly to venture farther into such a bog.

So intent had she been on her own predicament as not to notice that it was shared by any one else, till, raising her eyes, she saw just ahead two persons who were evidently in a worse plight than herself. She was presently sure that one of them could be no other than Milton Carrol; but what was he doing? With whom was he struggling? Was it his father? Yes; Jessie could now hear the old man's voice:

"Let me go, Milton. Why do you try to detain me? I am not mad, as you think; but concealment is killing me."

Should she try to go to them, or not? Evidently the doctor was having one of the bad spells of which she had lately heard, when his family found it hard to control him. The thought that Milton Carrol might be annoyed to have her come upon him in this plight, for a moment made her hesitate, the next, she determined to go to his assistance ; so, putting aside all regard for consequences to herself, she was presently within a few feet of them.

“Can I help you, Mr. Carrol?” she called.

Taken entirely by surprise, as he had not known that any one was near, Milton Carrol turned, releasing his hold of his father as he did so.

“O, Miss Jessie! do not come any further, pray,” he cried, realizing the sorry condition in which she might presently find herself.

“The mud is not quite so deep here as where you are,” she called back in reply, as if she saw only the fact that they were mired. She would give him a chance to ask her help at least, since she could go for aid if he wished.

The sight of Jessie venturing into this slough of despond had made Milton Carrol for a moment lose his self-possession, and he had let go his hold

of his father, who took instant advantage of his freedom. Had it not been for the mud which clogged his feet, the doctor would probably have gotten away ; but as it was, his son had him again in his grasp before he had taken the second step. Then it was that the doctor turned and made a piteous appeal to Jessie.

“Help me, Miss Jessie, to get away from my son. He says that I am mad, but I assure you I am as sane as yourself. I am a penitent man, and would give myself up to justice, for I am a murderer. Would to God that I were only mad.” The old man’s voice had risen to a wail.

“Where do you want to go, Doctor Carrol?” Jessie asked, as if it were only reasonable his wishes in this matter should be regarded. Perhaps it was the way she asked the question quite as much as the question itself which had such a remarkable effect upon the doctor ; for the tense lines disappeared instantly from his face, and there was nothing in his voice to remind one of the agony of passion which had been there a moment before, when he answered, —

“I was on my way to Boston, for I must go there in order to give myself up to justice.”

“But look, Doctor Carrol ; see how muddy your clothes are ! Wouldn’t it be better to go home and change them first ? You don’t want to be seen in Boston in such a plight as this,” Jessie said, pointing out to him the splashes of mud which disfigured his whole person. Happily, she had created the diversion in his thoughts which she wished, as he seemed to realize the force of this argument, and was regarding his dress with dismay.

Seeing the advantage she had gained, Jessie was quick to follow it up.

“I was on my way to Newbury Hill,” she said, “but I shall have to go home and wait till the walking is better.” And then a happy thought suggesting itself,—“If you will give me your arm, Doctor, I think together we shall get out of this bog better than alone.”

A few moments later, no one meeting the two would have supposed the doctor less sane than his companion ; for his chivalrous instinct had at once responded to Jessie’s appeal, and he was presently helping her over the worst places in the road, her safe conduct out of the mud seemingly his sole consideration.

Milton Carrol had been struck with amazement at the girl's coolness and courage in asking his father for his arm, but further than a look eloquent of gratitude on his part, no communication had passed between them.

His first feeling had been one of discomfiture that Jessie Norberry should be a witness of his unfortunate position. She was the last person in the town whom he would have chosen to meet just then, or to whom he would have looked for assistance ; for he had often heard her sallies of wit, and knew her aptitude for seeing the ludicrous side of every situation ; but he had yet to learn that Jessie's mirth was never turned against the unfortunate.

He felt now that her kindness, tact and good sense had on this occasion at least saved him from a painful dilemma, since he had used every argument he could think of to win his father from his purpose, and when Jessie came up it was just a contest of strength between them, in which his muscles could not have much longer held out against the force born of frenzy.

He could but admire the graceful tact with which Jessie led his father's mind away from the exciting

subject, and then with lively chat and jest occupied and amused him.

As Milton Carrol listened to the low sweet voice and musical laugh which had in it Nature's own echo, he realized the peculiar charm which this girl had always exercised over himself, and he no longer wondered that his father had yielded to the witching grace which he had found so captivating. He had always felt that she was different from other girls, and now he had had proof of it, he thought; for where was the other girl of his acquaintance who would have so admirably conducted herself in such an emergency?

On reaching Elm Brook Farm Jessie tried to excuse herself from going in, on the plea that she was not in trim to make a call, but the doctor insisted upon it. He evidently was not disposed to lose her companionship because he had got home, and as symptoms of excitement were at once apparent in manner and speech when he found himself likely to do so, Jessie saw it would not be well to cross him.

Mrs. Carrol had evidently been on the lookout for her husband, for she met them at the door, and seemed greatly relieved at the apparently pa-

cific condition in which he had returned. It took her but a moment to understand the situation, and then she too joined her entreaties to his that Jessie should come in. Our heroine had never been at Elm Brook Farm, and though feeling that a call now was most inopportune under the circumstances, there seemed nothing else to do if she would not provoke a return of the nervous excitement she had just used her best efforts to subdue.

Mrs. Carrol seemed gratified at her compliance, and at once led the way to the family sitting-room, making an effort to appear at ease ; but Jessie had seen the glance exchanged between mother and son, and knew that the wife's anxiety was at the moment paramount to every other feeling.

On entering, however, the girl's wit did not desert her, for no sooner was the doctor safely within the house, than she made a lively charge upon her bemuddled boots, gayly asking Mrs. Carrol how she could with equanimity receive such dirty people into her house. Then seeing the doctor was about to seat himself, she became suddenly concerned for the welfare of the chair.

"O, doctor ! you will never spoil that pretty

chair by sitting down in that coat," she cried, at the same time giving his wife a glance which the latter was quick to interpret.

"Miss Jessie I know will excuse you, father, while you come and change your coat ; for really it is not fit to sit down in." The doctor yielded reluctantly to his wife's suggestion, but presently he was induced to leave the room with her for a change in his apparel.

The moment the door closed upon them, Jessie, who had not ceased to feel herself *de trop* since her entrance, seized the opportunity to take her leave.

"Mr. Carrol, I must ask you to make my apologies to your mother, but I am sure I had best go before your father returns," she said, on finding herself alone with the doctor's son.

"Perhaps you are right, Miss Jessie ; I appreciate the unpleasantness of the situation for you, and your kindness in coming in. You have my heartfelt thanks for what you did for me this afternoon."

Milton Carrol spoke as if under some powerful restraint, and feeling the delicacy of his position, Jessie returned quickly :

"Oh ! that is not worth speaking of. Any one would have done as much." She would have added "Good-day," when Mr. Carrol interposed.

"*You* may count it a small service, Miss Jessie, but I think few young ladies would have faced such an ordeal. I shall never forget that your woman's wit and kindness saved my mother and myself a painful exposure."

"It is very unfortunate your father should not always be himself. You have my sincerest sympathy," Jessie said feelingly.

"You are more than kind, but excuse my detaining you a moment. I want to tax your kindness still farther: please do not think worse of my father for what he said of himself to-day, or for what you may hear others say of him; for I assure you that a worthier life than he has lived is scarcely possible. I will not deny," he continued, "that there are certain circumstances which seem to tell against him, and which we cannot explain, though we live in hope that the day will come when we can do so, and when we shall be able to clear his name from the foul charge which now rests upon it."

It was no slight thing to Milton Carrol that his

father's fair fame should be doubted, and when to this was added the affliction of his clouded intellect, was it to be wondered at that the inmates of Elm Brook Farm had shut themselves away from those who had no sympathy for them in their trouble?

Jessie had not before realized the shadow which rested on this house, or the isolation and loneliness of the wife and son whose misfortune had so completely separated them from their neighbors.

"Mr. Carrol, I will believe nothing of your father unworthy of a good and honorable man," was Jessie's earnest and heartfelt response. "I am grateful for your confidence," she added, "and no one shall ever be the wiser from me for anything I have heard or seen to-day."

"Thank you ; I felt sure I might trust to your silence," was Mr. Carrol's reply, grasping with a hearty pressure the hand she gave him in parting.

Jessie's thoughts were occupied with this matter as she retraced her steps homeward.

"I wonder why Aunt Helen has never called upon Mrs. Carrol. It cannot be for the reason that she is not her social and intellectual equal, which is her usual excuse for not visiting our peo-

ple.” Jessie so completely identified herself with her uncle’s family, that she always spoke of his parish in this way. She remembered now how completely her aunt had held aloof from the Carrols, and she was puzzled to account for her doing so, as the parsonage gave little credence to the rumors which were afloat in the community.

“Aunty shall go and see Mrs. Carrol. It is a shame for people to treat her as they do. She has enough to bear even if we stand by her.” Jessie’s sympathies had been greatly excited toward the doctor’s family by what she had seen and heard this afternoon, and she resolved that hereafter the parsonage should take no neutral ground toward the Carrols.

It was a long time before she heard the last of her getting bogged in Plover’s Gully; for her cousin Allan had heard of it in some way, and perhaps for the reason that Jessie herself had nothing to say about it, he fancied it teased her to have the matter mentioned; so, boy-like, he reminded her of it on every occasion.

But Jessie was not likely soon to forget the circumstance, for it had made too deep an impression upon her mind to be easily effaced. Perhaps for

the reason that she could speak of the experience to no one, it occupied more of her thoughts. Somehow there seemed a horrible fascination in the remembrance— strive as hard as she would to put it away, Memory was constantly evoking the anguished ravings of the unfortunate man, till her dreams were often haunted by them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LETTER.

DOCTOR CARROL was not seen abroad again for the winter ; and before spring opened, what had previously been but suspicion, had grown into a direct charge.

The doctor had committed some crime, from the consequences of which his wife and son were striving to screen him.

Jessie frequently heard this said in one way and another, but always treated it as too preposterous for credence, while her heart went out in sympathy to those who could neither defend themselves, nor him who was dearer to them than even their own good name.

Mrs. Carrol and her son need not try to make it appear that the charges which the doctor brought against himself were but the vagaries of a diseased mind ; his neighbors were sure they knew better. Why had he always shut himself away from every one ? If he were insane now, he had

not been five years before, when he had first come among them. No ; it was only when remorse for his crime had prompted him to confess it, that his family had declared him insane.

John Norberry was not unaware of the feeling in the town, and while it troubled him greatly, he found himself unable to say or do anything to stay it.

Of what avail was it for him to remind the doctor's accusers of the devoted wife and son who were bearing a double trial under their suspicions and denunciations, since he always received the same answer in one form or another :—

“They deserved to suffer. It was no more than right that they should, since their pride would not bow to the humiliation of having the truth known.”

On one of his calls at Elm Brook Farm, the minister had suggested to Mrs. Carrol that medical treatment might help her husband's case ; for it was a fact often commented upon in the town, that a physician had never been called in, even when the doctor had been at his worst.

This suggestion, however, was no sooner made than the minister saw that it was not well received.

Mrs. Carrol evidently considered it bordering upon interference. For a moment she seemed quite embarrassed, and then with more hauteur than he had ever seen her show, she replied: "Mr. Norberry, I think I understand the feeling that moves you to advise me in this matter; for I am aware of what is said in Newbury. As far as any advice is prompted by regard for my husband, I am grateful for it; but had we not known that medical treatment was entirely unavailing in Doctor Carrol's case, we should never have come here. That rest and quiet are the only agents that can ever restore his overworked nerves, has been the verdict of the first physicians in this country as well as Europe."

John Norberry did not again attempt to advise Mrs. Carrol, though he sympathized heartily with her in the trouble she was so bravely bearing.

While the most friendly relations existed between himself and the doctor's son, the latter never in any way alluded to the charges made against them as a family; and since Milton Carrol was so reticent in this matter, the minister did not invite a confidence which was not freely given. He could but note, however, that the last two years had left their mark upon his young friend,

who seemed to have suddenly reached the maturity of middle life, and when they met now it was as those standing on the same level of experience.

At this time, Elm Brook Farm held but little intercourse with the outside world. The frequent, informal calls of neighbors who had been wont to run in at all times of day, after the fashion of most country neighborhoods, had ceased entirely. Mrs. Carrol for the last two years had not encouraged this kind of caller, for the reason that it confined the doctor to his room, since he was not willing to see visitors. And lest his freedom of the house should be restricted, his wife shut herself away from the society she might otherwise have had.

The service that Jessie Norberry had rendered the doctor in bringing him home that afternoon, gained her a warm friend in his wife ; for Mrs. Carrol fully appreciated this act which had prevented any publicity being given to her husband's wild purpose.

A few days later, she had written the girl a graceful note, warmly expressing her gratitude, and in which she begged Jessie to come and see her, making the plea that she had very little society, and was often lonely.

Jessie did go, and was so charmed with the elegant and agreeable woman that she soon repeated her call.

And now a cordial welcome always awaited the minister's niece at Elm Brook Farm, where Mrs. Carrol exercised her rare tact and unusual conversational powers to entertain her young visitor. So it was little wonder that Jessie enjoyed going there, or that she often declared the doctor's wife to be the most delightful lady of her acquaintance.

She occasionally met Doctor Carrol in his home, and he always seemed glad to see her, often remaining in the room the whole time of her stay. This was a course so different from what he usually pursued toward visitors, that it was quite noticeable. That the doctor enjoyed her visits was the plea Mrs. Carrol used in urging Jessie to come often.

She had not been at the farm for some weeks, having heard in the meantime that the doctor was suffering from an unusually severe attack of his malady, and fearing that a visit might be inopportune. When she learned that he was better, she was seized with a fit of compunction for having neglected her friend so long, and took the first

opportunity to go and see her. She found Mrs. Carrol more depressed than she had ever seen her. It seemed the doctor's violent symptoms had given place to a settled melancholy, from which it was impossible to rouse him. He appeared disinclined to talk at all ; but when he did it was to mourn his sinful state, in which he fancied himself living under the wrath and curse of God. His disease had apparently taken the form of religious mania ; and this evidently destroyed the hope which his poor wife had before entertained of his ultimate recovery.

While she was speaking of her fears in this respect, the door of the room where she and Jessie were sitting, suddenly opened, and who should enter but the doctor himself.

"Why, Doctor Carrol!" his wife exclaimed, surprise, almost consternation, depicted on her face ; but a moment later she had recovered herself, and asked almost naturally, "If he had missed her? or, had he come to see Miss Jessie?"

"Both," returned the doctor, smiling, and greeting Jessie with his old-time courtesy.

Certainly no one would have taken him for a demented man. He was dressed with scrupulous

care, and was apparently more at his ease than the two whom his appearance had suddenly disconcerted.

“Do not go yet, Miss Jessie! It is a long time since you have been here; stay and spend the afternoon,” he urged, when, a few minutes after his entrance, Jessie rose to take her leave; for she had been not a little embarrassed by his sudden appearance just as his wife had told her that he did not leave his room. Of course his doing so now was but the freak of an unsound mind, and might possibly indicate the approach of another violent attack of his malady. To be sure there was nothing in his appearance to betoken this; his present mood was certainly a very mild one, but could it be depended upon?

These thoughts were passing through Jessie's mind as the doctor spoke. There was nothing to prevent her staying longer, as he seemed to wish it, and Mrs. Carrol's eyes were asking her to humor his whim; so she made a sort of mental compromise: she would not go at once, though by remaining she felt she was subjecting herself to a painful ordeal.

“There is nothing which necessitates my going

at once ; but I shall not be able to remain all the afternoon, as Aunt Kitty has gone out to tea, and I shall have to be at home to look after the children," she said, resuming her seat.

The doctor seemed pleased at her compliance, and settled back in his easy-chair as if prepared to enjoy her stay. On her former visits he had generally sat in silence, though not an uninterested listener to what she and his wife had to say, as a nod or smile would now and then attest. But this afternoon he at once took the initiative in the way of conversation, and proved himself to be cognizant of matters in the town in which his family had not supposed him to take any interest, discussing with a discriminating, clear-headed judgment topics which would have seemed impossible for one to discuss whose mind was deranged.

For the first time in her acquaintance with him, Jessie had a glimpse of what Doctor Carrol had been before this cloud came upon him ; and she never afterward doubted that on this occasion he had, for a time at least, regained a healthy mental balance.

His conversation this afternoon proved that even in his seclusion he had kept himself informed of

what was going on about him, and more than once his visitor was struck by his keen and critical analysis of people and motives. Jessie glanced now and then at Mrs. Carrol, who took little part in the conversation, but whose face was perfectly transformed with happiness. It was as if Hope had whispered in her heart the promise of better days.

After a time the conversation came round to books, when the subject of a popular work was introduced, which reminded Jessie to ask the doctor if he had seen the last *Quarterly*, in which a criticism of this by her uncle had appeared.

He had not read it, he said, but would take an early opportunity to look it up. Then he spoke of her uncle as an able writer, and predicted that he would make a name and place in literature were he to enter that field. This reminded him of a work which he wanted the minister to read.

"Wife, will you get that book Burton sent me a few weeks ago? It is on my study table," the doctor said, apologizing for not going to fetch it himself, on the plea of his lameness, an infirmity which had been growing upon him of late.

Mrs. Carrol had no sooner left the room to com-

ply with his request, than he drew a letter from the breast pocket of his coat.

It did not occur to Jessie to feel any fear at being left alone with the doctor, till he came over to her, and, stooping down so as to bring his face on a level with her own, begged in a whisper which was tragic in its earnestness, that she would do him a favor.

“All I ask is that you will deliver this letter in person to the man whose address is written upon it. But not at present must you do this ; not till you hear of my death. Will you promise to do this for me ?” he added, in a voice that was almost sepulchral in its unnatural pitch and intensity.

In the first instant of finding this strangely transformed face so near her own, Jessie started back, but quickly recovered herself. She would not show any fear, since the madman might take advantage of it ; but her voice was far from being steady when she answered, —

“Certainly, doctor ; I will do anything for you that I can.” She did not offer, however, to take the letter which he held toward her, and evidently thinking she had not understood his request, he repeated it.

“Will you take this and deliver it? I know of no one else to whom I can entrust it, and I feel sure that I can depend upon you, if you give me your word you will do it. It is not a hard thing that I ask of you. Promise!” This last was almost a menace.

Oh! if his wife would only come back. What could be keeping her? Jessie felt that she must reply, for those strange wild eyes held her as by some subtle, dreadful charm.

“I should be glad to serve you, Doctor, but you must be mistaken in thinking you have not other friends who would do so small a service for you. I am sure your wife or son” —

“They must not know anything about it,” interposed the doctor. “That is just why I wish you to do it. Miss Jessie, do not fail me. I have depended upon you to carry this, my full confession, to the only person living, who knows anything of the crime which is slowly killing me. I cannot die without making it known.” The doctor had changed his tone and attitude to a supplicating one, and was now on his knees, though those basilisk eyes never for a moment removed themselves from his victim’s face.

“You must not refuse to do this for me, or evil will” — Here a draught of air in the hall shut to the door of the room. The doctor started violently, then thrusting the letter into Jessie’s hand, cried excitedly,—

“Conceal it quickly ; no one must see it,” and instinctively the girl’s hand went to her pocket. She must take the letter since forced to do so, but later she could give it to his wife.

“Thanks, my dear girl. The prayers of a truly penitent man will follow you,” cried the doctor, grasping her hand and pressing it with a fervor, apparently born of intense relief.

What had she done? Was this tacit consent to his wishes to be a binding obligation? To deliver a letter seemed a simple thing enough, but in this case what might it not entail? Thoughts like these were passing confusedly through Jessie’s brain as the doctor regained his chair.

A moment later, when his wife entered, there was nothing in the doctor’s appearance to give a hint of what had just occurred ; though Jessie’s absorbed expression did not escape Mrs. Carrol, who wondered what had brought such a thoughtful, introspective look to the bright face.

She apologized for having being gone so long, but said she had quite a hunt for the book, which she had finally found among a pile of papers.

In taking it from his wife, the doctor thanked her, but he had apparently forgotten his purpose in regard to it, and Jessie would have left the house without it, had not Mrs. Carrol reminded him of his intention.

After what had just passed, Jessie could but feel that the doctor had *finessed* not a little to get his wife out of the room ; that this book had only been a part of his plan to see her alone, and she was ill at ease in taking her leave of Mrs. Carrol with that letter in her pocket.

The doctor had followed her to the door, allowing her no opportunity to carry out her purpose in regard to it. Had he suspected that she would give it to his wife? He had at least made it impossible for her to do so without his knowledge ; and his parting words had seemed to strengthen the obligation to which her silence had bound her.

"A friend in need is a friend indeed," he had said with a pressure of her hand which had made his meaning unmistakable, though his words had seemed to supplement his wife's expression of

gratitude that Jessie had not stood upon ceremony with her in the matter of calls.

The girl's feelings were anything but comfortable as she walked home with the doctor's letter still in her possession. What should she do with it? To give it up now to any one but the person for whom it was intended, seemed to her an outrage of trust, against which her sense of right revolted.

If she only had not taken it! She should have been firm in refusing to have anything to do with the doctor's commission, since it was to be kept from his wife's knowledge. Now as she recalled that moment it seemed as if a power outside of herself had compelled her to take that letter.

She certainly had not intended to; she had weakly yielded when she should have been firm; for now Jessie laughed at the thought that she had really any thing to fear from the doctor. He would never have harmed her in any way, nor could he have forced her to take it. No; her will must be naturally weak. Had the habit of yielding it under her Aunt Helen's discipline grown into a defect of character? It seemed very like it, since she had had no doubt as to what was right in this

matter. She had compromised with principle. The weakness of her character had got the better of her. Jessie did not spare herself in these accusations, though she was fain to remember the many contests of will in which she had been utterly worsted, and left to gather up such bits of her own personality as had survived the struggle.

Well, she would at least see to what she now stood committed through this last unfortunate surrender of her will ; and taking the letter from her pocket, she read the following address,—

DOCTOR BENJAMIN K. LANDFORD,
Arlington, Hanover Co., New York State.

If she kept this letter she would have to find this man in New York State. That, probably, would not be a very great undertaking ; but she was not called upon to do this at present. “When you hear of my death,” Doctor Carrol had said ; and the day might be far distant when she would be required to redeem her pledge. In the meantime she would be likely often to see Doctor Carrol, and it would be strange if she could not find an opportunity to give it back to him, and be quit of all responsibility in the matter.

Then her mind went back to the day when Milton Carrol had spoken to her of his father's hallucination. He had allowed that there was a mystery in his life to which they had not the clue. It might be that this letter would furnish it ; probably make everything clear. But might it not prove that the doctor's accusers had been right in taking his charges against himself at their worst ?

No ; she would not believe that any grave charge could be proved against this man, whose honorable, Christian principles she could not doubt. Besides, had she not promised Milton Carrol that she would believe no evil of his father ? and now should she give the lie to her words, by assuming that this letter could criminate him ? — that it was the confession of an actual crime ? No ; she could best prove his innocence by giving what publicity she could to his confession. But even this thought did not change Jessie's determination to be quit of such an obligation on the first opportunity. The more her mind dwelt upon it, the harder it was for her to believe that Doctor Carrol had not known what he was talking about that afternoon. No one could have handled the subjects that he had more intelligently.

CHAPTER V.

MISS NORBERRY'S MISTAKE.

CATHERINE, I think it is high time a stop should be put to Jessie's going so much to the Carrols. The first thing we know she will be involved in a love entanglement, which we should all deplore."

Helen Norberry had deliberated some little time before expressing herself in this way to her sister-in-law, knowing that both she and the minister felt very kindly to the doctor's family ; and that neither of them believed that there was any foundation for the reports current against him, other than in his own diseased fancy. But whether there was or not, was not the point with Miss Norberry. There certainly was the taint of insanity in the Carrol blood, and that, in this lady's opinion, was a sufficient ban, even if there were no other.

And now her suspicions were aroused that her niece was becoming interested in the doctor's son, who evidently was more than interested in her.

Several times of late she had heard Jessie warmly defend Milton Carrol from aspersions which had been made against him in her presence ; and this, with other things, had opened Miss Norberry's eyes to her niece's danger in this acquaintance.

"Milton Carrol," Miss Norberry continued, "is just the kind of man to take the fancy of a girl like Jessie, and the very fact that she believes him to be misrepresented and maligned, makes him more interesting to her. We are certainly doing wrong in allowing her to go there so often."

"From the fact that she does go there often, I feel sure, Helen, you are mistaken in thinking there is any such feeling on her part. Jessie is not the girl to put herself in any man's way. She has never spoken of meeting him, and her calls upon his mother are invariably at such times as he is unlikely to be at home. But even if she does occasionally meet him in this way, I see no harm in her doing so ; and certainly neither her uncle nor myself would feel like forbidding her to go there."

"Forbidding her to go there," interposed Miss Norberry, "would be as foolish a thing as could

be done. If I did not understand human nature pretty thoroughly I might have made that blunder myself. But Jessie would have known at once that the prohibition was on Milton Carrol's account, and if she has not already exalted him to the highest pinnacle of her regard, she would do so directly. If you or John do not see danger for her in this acquaintance, I do ; and I furthermore realize that our only safe course will be to send her away from Newbury. Her Annt Wilson must invite her there to spend the winter ; and not only must such a request meet with no opposition from us, but Jessie must be made to see it in the light of duty. Mrs. Wilson is her mother's only sister, and it is no more than right that Jessie should make her a long visit now and then. In Boston she will be in no danger of meeting Milton Carrol, or of having her sympathies worked upon by his family. My brother Allan's child must form no improper or romantic attachments."

Miss Norberry had spoken very decidedly, and her sister-in-law saw that her mind was fully made up to the step she proposed. That she had Jessie's real interest at heart, could not be questioned, however mistaken she might be in her methods.

Helen Norberry had filled the place of a mother to Jessie since the latter was two years old ; and though her rule had been an iron one, she had been conscientious in the discharge of her duties. In return she had received the obedience she demanded, and such a measure of love as was natural from a child of Jessie's warm, affectionate nature.

But it was to her Aunt Kitty that Jessie had gone with all her childish sorrows and confidences, and this relative really knew her better than she who had taken the place of a mother to her.

"I do not think Jessie will care to spend so long a time with her Aunt Wilson ; her home can scarcely be a pleasant one for any young girl. Besides, I can't bear to think of her going away from us."

Mrs. Norberry was troubled, and the usually serene expression of her face had given place to something like a frown ; but this quickly disappeared as she remembered that Jessie herself would have a word to say about this, and that she might put an effectual veto upon the measure by resolutely declining her Aunt Wilson's invitation.

"I can't fancy why you have singled out Milton Carrol ; but since you seem to feel so sure that he

stands ready to gobble Jessie up, perhaps to save her from so dreadful a fate it may be best to send her away," Mrs Norberry smilingly said.

"I don't see that it is any joking matter, Catherine," Miss Norberry replied stiffly. "If I can help it, Jessie shall not be sacrificed to a false sentiment. Rather than she should ever be Milton Carrol's wife, I would willingly see her lie dead in her coffin."

Mrs. Norberry was accustomed to such strong expressions, and was wont to say in plea for her, "It is only Helen's way," but in this instance she looked not a little shocked, and, for a moment, did not reply. Then she said quietly, —

"I cannot see this as you do, Helen, but if her uncle thinks it best that Jessie should go away from Newbury, I will not oppose, sorry as I shall be to part with her."

In talking this over with her brother, Miss Norberry made a point of Jessie's growing intimacy with the doctor's wife, which brought her so often in contact with the family, and though she had nothing in proof of an attachment at present existing between her niece and Milton Carrol, she insisted that there was danger of such a contingency.

Like his wife, John Norberry could not see where the danger to Jessie, in this acquaintance, lay ; nor did he regard it as so very contumacious on Milton Carrol's part, should he aspire to his niece's hand. But when his sister abruptly asked him if he wished Jessie to marry into a mad family she had him at a disadvantage.

"Like father, like son," she said. "Even now Milton Carrol was different from other young men ; but what might to-day pass for eccentricity in him, a few years hence would be recognized as the family taint. He was a dangerous acquaintance for a girl who held the romantic notions that Jessie did about friendship and honor."

"Last month it was young Mildmay, now it is Mr. Carrol. It seems to me, Helen, that you magnify your duties," ventured the minister mildly.

"That was quite a different matter. I spoke for Mr. Mildmay's own sake. Jessie is in no danger there. I do think, as I said, that you had better not invite him here to preach again ; anybody can see that he has eyes and ears only for Jessie."

"He shows his good taste at least," was the minister's amused rejoinder. He well knew the

young divine's *penchant* for his beautiful niece; and also knew that Jessie was quite indifferent to him in return.

"That's as you think," sharply returned Miss Norberry. "He doesn't show his good sense, at any rate, to be so enamored of a fair face as to forget a waiting congregation, and his duties in the house of God. The last time he preached here the bell had stopped tolling some time before he was able to tear himself away from Jessie. Then he ran every step of the way, to find the whole parish waiting for him when he got there."

The minister had slightly raised his eyebrows while his sister was speaking; an evidence that he was annoyed. "If Mildmay forgot himself, Jessie should have reminded him," he said gravely.

"Well, she did not, and it is not the first time, either, that she has amused herself at his expense."

Miss Norberry carried the day in the matter of sending Jessie away from Newbury, as her uncle had no particular objection to her making Mrs. Wilson a visit; though his acquiescence in his sister's plans were passive rather than active.

Jessie had hesitated about accepting her aunt's invitation, because, for certain reasons, she felt un-

willing just at this time to leave Newbury. The strongest of these was that she had not yet found an opportunity to return that letter to Doctor Carrol, though she had gone often to his house hoping to do so. Of late, this had proved almost a nightmare to her, for its possession disturbed even her sleeping hours. She was constantly dreaming that she had lost it, when she would be in great trouble lest some one might find it who would carry it to her aunt ; her care for it even coloring her unconscious hours. For a time she had carried it about her person, in order that she might have it at hand, should an opportunity occur for returning it ; but finally the envelope had become so worn as to make her fear that it would not much longer screen from prying eyes the secret committed to its pages. Then for its safer keeping, she had locked it up in one of the drawers of her bureau ; but she had since been constantly haunted with the fear that her Aunt Helen would demand the key to its hiding-place. This, to be sure, had not happened yet ; and since this letter had been consigned to its present sanctuary it had been removed only on the occasions of her visits to the doctor's wife.

These visits had grown more frequent of late, for the desire to get that letter out of her hands had come to be an absorbing one.

Since the unlucky day when it had been forced upon her, she had never for a moment seen Doctor Carrol alone. Now, if she went away from Newbury, how was she to accomplish her purpose? But was not farther resistance useless? Fate seemed forcing her on to the carrying out of the doctor's trust. If she went away, she must take this letter with her, as she was in honor bound to shield its secret, and if she left it at home her aunt would be sure sooner or later to come upon it.

Mrs. Wilson had been quick to respond to Miss Norberry's intimation that Jessie needed a change, and had written her niece that she was lonely, and desired her company, putting in a strong claim to the right of at least a part of her time.

That her relatives in Newbury had been strangely ready to give her up did not escape Jessie, though she little suspected that her going had been a concerted plan. To be sure her Aunt Kitty cried when the matter was settled, and her cousins Allan and Roger loudly protested against this visit. But with her uncle and Aunt Helen

nothing had seemed to have any weight in the balance with her Aunt Wilson's claims.

It might be her duty to go, as her friends seemed to think, but Jessie could not bring herself to feel any pleasure in the thought of this visit.

And a fortnight later, when she found herself settled for the winter in her Aunt Wilson's house, the world and all its enjoyments seemed as entirely shut away from her as if she had entered upon a conventual life.

The great gloomy rooms oppressed and stifled her, much as the air of a prison might, of which it most reminded her, and many times a day she found herself longing for the cheery home she had left, and the companionship of the wide-awake, warm-hearted little cousins, whose merry shout and boyish whistle would have been music in her ears.

The narrow horizon which now bounded her vision had the effect of turning it in upon herself, and her world seemed to hold but one object of interest. She was, in fact, fast becoming a disciple of Fichte, without knowing anything of his philosophy—in that she was acquiring the habit of referring all things to herself, and judging everything by its relation to her own interests.

Mrs. Wilson had shut herself away from society till she was apparently forgotten. The few friends who had formerly come often to the house had grown weary of her chronic state of invalidism; or new interests absorbed them; and the monotony of her life was, therefore, seldom broken by communication with the outside world. Her well-drilled corps of servants went about on tiptoe, in deference to her invalid nerves, and even the inanimate accessories of her life seemed to have become imbued with the spirit of quietness which had so long reigned in the old house; for so much as a creaking door seldom disturbed its peace.

It was the invalid's habit to lie all day upon the sofa or reclining chair, where she kept her maid in constant attendance. It was wonderful how much she found for Martha to do about her person. That she must have made a study of this matter of attendance, Jessie felt sure, not realizing how proficient in this respect one may become in years of practice.

When Mrs. Wilson was not suffering from any one of the host of ills with which she thought herself afflicted, Jessie read aloud to her two hours every morning, and again in the afternoon if the

invalid wished. The books her aunt preferred were not often such as she would have chosen, but she was glad of any occupation that should draw her away from herself.

In her private communings at this time (and they were frequent), Jessie accused herself of having no spirit. Not another girl of her acquaintance would endure such a life as she was leading. Several times she resolved to write her uncle that she could not stay longer, but the days went by, and she did not put it in practice. But had it not been for the vocal and painting lessons, for which she went out several times a week, she told herself that nothing could have made her monotonous life endurable.

One day soon after New Year's, she met Doctor Forney in a bookstore, and he seemed much struck by her appearance.

"Are you well? It seems to me you are not looking so," he said solicitously.

Jessie assured him of her health, and then rather listlessly (as she did everything in these days) asked him to call and see her at her aunt's, where she was spending the winter.

He promised to do so, and a few days later

called and invited her to attend a concert with him the following evening, an invitation which she gladly accepted.

After this she saw him frequently, till it seemed as if some occult power was drawing them together ; so sure were they to meet if Jessie stepped out of doors. And she was going out more of late, having determined to hunt up some old school friends whom she knew would have called upon her ere this, had they learned of her being in the city. But whatever direction she chanced to take, going or coming, she was almost certain to see the doctor, till she came to regard him as less a man of leisure than she had supposed.

The winter had finally worn away, and spring opened, but Jessie was not recalled home as she had expected. She could not see that she was doing her Aunt Wilson any particular good by remaining ; but that lady would not hear of her going back to Newbury.

As the days went by, Jessie thought that the morrow would surely bring her the word of release ; but it did not come. She saw her uncle occasionally, when business obliged him to take a hurried

trip to the city ; but he said not a word about her going back, and pride would not allow her to suggest it. She had supposed they would miss her, and would rebel at her staying longer away ; but when no message to that effect came, she told herself that she did not mind, that it was just as well ; but nevertheless she was conscious of a dull pain at her heart which the bright spring weather did not help to ease. How she longed at this time for a sight of the fair green fields of old Newbury, and the delightful wooded haunts with which she was familiar ; its sheltered dells and breezy uplands were all remembered now.

In fancy she could see them waking to new life and beauty in the soft spring sunshine, where the dainty nun-like flowers were making their escape from Winter's cloistered cell.

She knew them all, and just where to look for them. There was the frosted silver mitrewert, the waxen cassandra, the creamy gold-thread, the starry wintergreen, with a host of others ; the thought of which made her sick at heart, that these sweet harbingers of the summer were not to be welcomed by herself, while the dusty city streets grew daily more intolerable.

CHAPTER VI.

A SUCCESSFUL PRESCRIPTION.

FROM considering always her own comfort, Mrs. Wilson had grown regardless of that of others ; but if there was any one in the world whom she loved beside herself, it was her niece, and she could not help seeing that Jessie drooped from day to day. What was the matter ? She had not used to be so listless and apathetic—in fact, the girl's buoyant spirits had been something of a cross to the weak and nervous woman. Was it simply that Jessie was growing older—laying aside her brisk, bright girlish ways, and taking on a more quiet habit of manner and thought ? Mrs. Wilson could but regret the change whatever had caused it ; she would gladly have seen again in her niece the sparkle and animation of former days.

Though Jessie never confessed of being ill, her aunt finally began to realize that she must be so ; and when this had fairly entered into her con-

sciousness (since it was hard for the woman to understand that any one but herself could be sick) she was aroused, and sent at once for her physician.

Doctor Bowen came, said Jessie was a little run down — that she needed a tonic, and after writing a prescription, predicted that she would be all right again in a few days.

Jessie swallowed without remonstrance, the teaspoonful of medicine which her aunt prepared for her ; but on taking the bottle to her room at night, as her relative advised, she threw the remainder out of the window.

On Doctor Bowen's second visit (for Mrs. Wilson not being satisfied with her niece's progress toward recovery had called the doctor in again) that fossilized piece of humanity wrote another prescription — made the original remark that it was very warm for the time of year, which, by the way, was the middle of June, and seasonable weather, and in another moment would have been gone, but in crossing the room for his hat he had encountered a pair of brown eyes which had been studying him intently. Whether it was in them that he found the inspiration of a new idea, or in

the crown of his hat which for a moment engaged his attention, it is impossible to say, since petrification is subject to no known laws ; but he had certainly found one somewhere, as he the next moment proved.

“Perhaps a change would be well for Miss Jessie ; better than medicine,” he said. “Old folks like ourselves,” bowing low to Mrs. Wilson, “who have been longer in the world, and who have become, so to speak, acclimated to it, rub along very well in the same old groove ; but young people should have an occasional change.”

Doctor Bowen’s fee was five dollars, and this time he had earned his money, for his words set Mrs. Wilson thinking ; the result of which was that she determined to take Jessie to the mountains. She did not come to this decision hastily, nor without counting the cost to herself in giving up the quiet comfort of her home for the noise and discomfort of a public hostelry. But she could not see Jessie sink into a state of invalidism, as she seemed to be doing. If it were change she needed, she should have it at any cost. Besides, if this condition of things continued, and her Newbury friends learned of her ill health, she

would be taken from the city at once, and perhaps not allowed again to visit her. Looking at it either way, matters were assuming a really serious turn, she felt, and something should be done immediately.

Jessie listened to her aunt's proposition without manifesting either surprise or interest in it. But this apathy on her part proved just the spur Mrs. Wilson needed, and now that she had some one to think of beside herself, that lady found herself able to do many things which a few weeks before she would have thought impossible.

It was getting late in the season, and there was some delay in securing desirable accommodations ; but finally arrangements were made which promised to be satisfactory in every way.

As the time of leaving approached, Jessie roused herself and began to show some interest in the preparations, occasionally suggesting something they might need during a summer's sojourn, for Mrs. Wilson intended to remain away till cool weather. She did not believe in leaving the city for a few weeks. "If one went at all, one should stay," she said, in making her arrangements.

Jessie brightened up so much the last few days

they were at home, that her aunt almost regretted her determination to go away, and felt she had perhaps been in too great haste, since her niece might have been just as well to remain in the city now that she had grown somewhat accustomed to the heat.

But the invalid knew there was no drawing back now, since matters had gone too far. They finally left the city on a sultry day early in July, and the same night found themselves safe at the Glen House with the grand old mountains all about them.

Their pleasant airy quarters at this hotel proved far more comfortable than Mrs. Wilson had anticipated, but still it was some little time before she entirely ceased to mourn for home privileges.

"The Bussells and Whitneys are here, Aunty, but I must beg to be excused from delivering the numberless messages they sent you. But you are to give me up to them and have no care—and they will only be too happy, etc., etc. How are you feeling this morning?" Jessie here suddenly remembered that she had not yet inquired for her aunt's health, an omission which was sure to be visited upon her; and for which she tried to atone

by stooping and kissing the worn face upon the pillow.

“As well as I could expect, after what I went through yesterday. Last night there was not a spot in my head that did not feel sore, and this morning it is not much better. But I’m glad you have found friends who will go about with you, for it is more than likely I shall not be up again for the summer.”

“Oh ! yes, you will, Aunt. You are tired this morning, of course, after such a long ride, but you will be down-stairs in a few days. The air here is sure to invigorate you, and I expect you’ll make the ascent of Mount Washington before we go home. I feel like another creature, just being here a few hours.”

Mrs. Wilson’s only response was an audible sigh, and a few minutes later Jessie quitted the room, feeling the utter futility of trying to convince so confirmed an invalid that life held anything better for her.

Her prediction that her aunt would be down-stairs in a few days, was not verified ; for it was a fortnight before that lady thought herself able to accomplish this feat. But from the day she first

did so she took her place among the guests of the house, appearing regularly at her meals, and laid entirely aside her invalid habits.

In the meantime, Jessie had entered with all the zest of youth and a light heart into the amusements which their delightful summer retreat afforded. Mountain air and cheerful company had proved all the tonic she needed ; and no one seeing her now would have dreamed that her health had so lately been a serious consideration.

Her old school friends, Jennie Bussell and Maud Whitney, she found pleasant, attractive girls, and though she had mentally outstripped them, there were many things they could and did enjoy in common. In her school days she had been often invited to their homes, where their parents had treated her with marked attention. Then, she had not understood why she was singled out for their regard ; now she knew that the favor had been shown to Allan Norberry's daughter. And on meeting her here they had claimed the right to chaperone her on the score of old friendship ; a right which Jessie did not gainsay, though she had soon settled the matter of chaperonage by yielding the right only to her aunt.

By the middle of August the hotel was full of guests representing our best American society, but one could not be long in the house without learning that the palm of belle-ship had been awarded to Jessie Norberry. Nor was this girl's pre-eminence in the house due to the fact of her being the daughter of the late honored Allan Norberry (as she would herself have attributed it) but to her beauty, grace, and charming unconsciousness of manner as well. No party was complete without Jessie, who was soon well up in the topography of all that delightful region where day after day in its sylvan glades she held the court of a Naiad queen.

Among the guests at this time were a Mr. Winter and his daughter. This gentleman was something of a recluse, avoiding society generally, but completely wrapped up in his child, whom he could seldom bear to have out of his sight.

Carrie Winter was evidently devoted to her father, and excused his seeming unsocial manner, from the fact that he had never gotten over her mother's death, which had been a very great blow to him. Although Mr. Winter had been a widower some years, he still spoke of his loss as a

recent one, and strangers supposed him passing through the early days of bereavement.

Jessie had from their first meeting been very much drawn to Carrie Winter, who was a singularly bright and interesting girl, and their acquaintance had ripened into a warm friendship.

Mr. Winter had come to the Glen only for a few days, but finding that his daughter had soon made friends, and that she was enjoying herself here, he had extended his stay from week to week, when he was suddenly recalled home in the midst of the season by business affairs which needed his attention.

On the last evening that Jessie and her friend Carrie would be together, they had gone to one of the parlors for a game of whist. This was about the only amusement in which Mr. Winter indulged, and his daughter had proposed it, seeing that the time was hanging heavily on his hands.

The band was playing just outside the windows, and a throng of promenaders were surging through the halls, while the little party of whist players were intent upon their game.

Jessie who sat with her back toward the door, was aware that a number of persons had

entered the room by the increased hum of voices, and she heard some one near her, say, "What a regal-looking woman!" but it was her turn to play at the moment, and she did not look up. The next, she heard her name spoken, and turning, saw her friend Mrs. Carrol.

"I caught a glimpse of you from the piazza, and was sure it must be Jessie Norberry, though I could hardly believe in such good fortune," said that lady, who, our heroine now saw, was accompanied by her husband and son.

Jessie had no sooner greeted these friends than she turned to introduce them to her party. But Mr. Winter had recognized Doctor Carrol, and held out his hand with a cordial welcome for his old acquaintance. "Doctor Carrol! Well, if this is not a surprise!" he was saying, his face alight with satisfaction.

But why did Doctor Carrol draw suddenly back, as if the figure before him had been a ghost? Certainly there was nothing repellent in the appearance of the man who had so heartily welcomed him. And why did the doctor's cheek suddenly blanch, and his limbs tremble so they would hardly support him?

If the hand extended to him had been a scorpion, he could hardly have regarded it with greater horror. Evidently he had received a shock of some kind, for his form suddenly swayed back into the arms of his son, who, hastily apologizing for his father's weak state, bore him away as if he had been a child.

Jessie at once excused herself to her friends, and followed Mrs. Carrol, from whom she learned that they had arrived at the Glen late that afternoon. It seemed the doctor had insisted upon coming down-stairs, though his wife had feared him too much fatigued already from his journey.

Mrs. Carrol was quite unnerved by what had occurred, and, for the first time since her acquaintance with that lady, Jessie saw her give way to tears.

"I am not often such a child as to cry," she said, apologizing for her momentary weakness, "but I have been under quite a nervous strain since we started. It was, of course, a doubtful experiment, taking the doctor from home, but his bodily health was suffering, and we hoped that a change might build him up. I am so glad to find you here, dear child," she said, putting her arms

about Jessie's neck as she added, "I feel as if you had been sent to me."

"I am sure I am glad to be here if my presence can be any comfort to you," Jessie returned heartily.

They had by this time reached Mrs. Carrol's apartments, and that lady went at once to her husband, promising to send Jessie word of his condition when he should have been got to bed.

Since her presence seemed to be a matter of satisfaction to Mrs. Carrol, Jessie determined to remain near till her anxiety as to this attack was relieved ; so taking a seat in the broad window-sill which commanded a view of the hall, she waited for the message which the doctor's wife had promised to send her, and presently fell into a reverie which made her entirely oblivious to her outward surroundings.

She had suddenly remembered that letter locked up in an escritoire in her Aunt Wilson's house. If Mr. Carrol were to die, she would be in honor bound to carry out the trust he had laid upon her. And he had looked so like death a moment since ! What a frail tenure he must hold on life to have been so easily overcome ; but by what ? Perhaps

it was a stroke. Jessie was sure she had heard of people being stricken down in this way, and even if he lived he might never again have the power of speech or consciousness. In that case she could not hope for a release from her obligation.

“Why, Miss Jessie, have you been waiting here all this time? My mother wished me to find you and say that my father seems quiet and inclined to sleep; so you are to have no further anxiety on his account.”

A white dress in the embrasure of the hall window had caught Milton Carrol's eye on his way to the broad staircase, and something in the attitude of the wearer arrested his steps. A second glance had shown him that he need go no further; but Jessie had not seen him till he was close upon her.

The color deepened on her cheek, and a sudden suffusion dimmed the soft eyes raised to his face, as she said :

“Oh! I am so glad. Then you do not think this attack will have any serious consequences?”

“No; I do not anticipate any more trouble. I think he will be all right by morning.”

Milton Carrol little dreamed how like a reprieve his words-had seemed to the girl beside him.

"But I am sorry this should have happened to mar your evening's pleasure," he continued. "If I see you looking so grave and anxious again as you were just now, I shall regret that we came here." The next moment he had offered Jessie his arm, and asked if he should not take her back to her friends.

"I am very glad that you did come here," was her smiling response, as she accepted his proffered arm. "But your father must have been much better than when I left Newbury, for you to think of going from home with him?" she added questioningly.

"Yes; there has appeared of late very little the matter with him, but a general debility. It seemed as if a change might be of benefit, and as the Glen was always one of his chosen summer haunts, we determined to bring him here. It was most unfortunate that he should have met his old friend, Mr. Winter, though I cannot imagine why it should have had such an effect upon him. That is, unless Mr. Winter is in some way connected with that page in my father's life of which I have not the reading."

For a moment after this Milton Carrol seemed

lost in revery, then he said decidedly : "It will be necessary now for us to get away from here as soon as possible, since we cannot risk his meeting Mr. Winter again, as he would be liable to at any moment were we to remain. It is very mysterious," he went on ; "for if there was ever any unpleasant passage between them, it is strange Mr. Winter should have met him as he did."

"Yes ; but you need not go from here on Mr. Winter's account, for he leaves the Glen to-morrow morning," Jessie said quickly.

"Going away in the morning, is he ? How long have you known of this intention ?" Milton Carol's face had lighted up at the information, but on second thought it occurred to him that Mr. Winter might be going on his father's account.

"Since yesterday morning, when he received a letter calling him home. His plans were all made before he met your father," Jessie replied, divining his thought.

"Then I will try and see him to-night, and explain my father's condition, for he seemed as much mystified at what occurred this evening as myself."

When they reached the parlor they learned that

Mr. Winter and Carrie had a few moments before quitted the house for a walk.

Mr. Carrol proposed that they should do the same ; but as his companion was not in walking costume, they confined their ramble to the now nearly deserted piazza, where, for the next fifteen minutes, they paced back and forth engaged in pleasant chat.

"So Henry Germaine is here? He and I are old college chums," Mr. Carrol said, when Jessie spoke of a party with whom she had that afternoon attempted an adventurous feat of mountain climbing.

From Mr. Carrol she learned that her Newbury friends were in open revolt at her long absence ; but to his declaration that everybody there missed her, and would be glad to have her back, she said nothing, feeling that her relatives, at least, had only to say the word ; and they were strangely silent.

"How majestically Mt. Washington seems to look down upon the lesser hills to-night," Jessie said, attempting to change the subject.

"Yes," was Mr. Carrol's absent reply, giving only a glance in the direction of the monarch of

that region, then returning at once to the subject uppermost in his mind.

"I heard that you were ill, and away travelling for your health, but in what part of the world my informant did not know." Mr. Carrol did not add that this had come from her cousin Allan ; or that he had ventured the belief that his cousin Jessie had gone out West. "So I little expected to meet you here ; but have you really been ill ? I think I never saw you looking better," with a glance at the sweet bright face that just came to his shoulder.

"Ill ? O, no ! not really. One cannot believe all one hears," was Jessie's smiling response.

"Then perhaps I am not to believe another report which I have heard," Mr. Carrol returned, regarding her closely.

"That depends, of course, upon what it was." Jessie spoke lightly, taking his words for banter.

"I heard," — Mr. Carrol hesitated, as if finding it difficult to say what he would with those laughing eyes meeting his own, — "I heard you were about to double your joys. That you were meditating matrimony."

"And who was the happy man ?" Jessie asked,

a slight flush mantling her cheek, which did not escape her companion.

“Who but Doctor Forney, the great scholar and writer, could hope to be the successful aspirant to Miss Jessie Norberry’s hand?” Mr. Carrol returned with a touch of sarcasm.

Jessie laughed gayly. “Doctor Forney, indeed ! No ; I have not that honor, past or prospective,” she said, and then became suddenly thoughtful.

Had the doctor’s name really been associated with hers in any such rumor ? She had never thought of such a result when availing herself of his kindness. To be sure he had been her only escort the last winter, but the times when she had been out with him could be counted upon the fingers of one hand.

Had her aunt Helen heard this ? Jessie now remembered that in every letter this lady had written her there had been some inquiry about the doctor. Had she been kept in Boston that she might meet him ? If so, she had only her aunt Helen to thank for her exile.

This thought brought Jessie’s lips firmly together, while the homely old proverb of the horse and the water came forcibly to her mind.

That Doctor Forney had only thought to show kindness to her father's daughter, she felt sure ; and in her late lonely and isolated life in her Aunt Wilson's house, she had been very glad of the little amusement he had thrown in her way.

Jessie was hardly aware of the complete silence which had fallen between herself and her companion, till Milton Carrol said with some constraint :

" Perhaps you would like to go in ? It may be cool for you here ? "

It was on Jessie's lips to disclaim against any such wish, when she heard Carrie Winter say :

" Why, here are Jessie and Mr. Carrol ! " and the next moment she was borne off by her friend, who wished her opinion of the selection of some photographic views she had just made.

Going with Carrie to the parlor, Jessie left Mr. Carrol and his father's old friend on the piazza together.

CHAPTER VII.

BY CHANCE, THE USUAL WAY.

AN hour later Milton Carrol was indulging in a revery. One light after another went suddenly out in the hotel, as its inmates sought the night's repose, but the man pacing so thoughtfully one of the long piazzas was in no mood for sleep.

The starry heavens hung like a shining disk above his head, while the grand solemn heights, looming about him, were sending forth their sweet aromatic odors upon the night air. But it was not with Nature that Milton Carrol was communing, though he was not insensible to her influence, but with his own heart.

Why had Fate ordained that he should meet Jessie Norberry here? He had not sought the meeting, and no prescience of danger had warned him off.

What was this mysterious attraction to which every fibre of his being responded? He had been

conscious of a great heart throb of delight when he had so unexpectedly come upon her ; now he knew that it would have been far better for his future peace of mind that they had not met.

The way in which she had parried his question about her engagement, had not deceived him. It was quite natural that she should treat the matter as she had—in fact it was the only way in which she could have met it, he reasoned, since he believed now that the announcement of it had been premature. But that she was interested in the doctor, and that she had found his society a sufficient reason for so prolonging her stay in the city, was with Milton Carrol a foregone conclusion. When she had so readily denied there being anything between herself and the doctor, he had for a brief moment hugged the hope with which for months he had been battling ; but her sudden and constrained silence afterward (as if she were immediately conscious of having gone too far in her denial) had seemed to confute her words. Then, too, had not his information of this attachment come from a member of her own family ? Who should know how matters stood between Jessie and the doctor if her relatives did not ? No, she

was not free, at all events, though she might not yet be bound by a positive engagement.

Well, since chance had thrown them together, he would make the most of his opportunity. He would at least have the joy of meeting her daily, and sunning himself in the rare magnetic presence in which his whole nature seemed to expand, till the world was an Eden in its possibilities of happiness. This prospect opened delightful vistas to his imagination, and in no small degree served to soothe his perturbed feelings, finally sending him to his rest to dream of her to whom he had unwittingly surrendered his whole heart.

It was in an unusually troubled frame of mind that Jessie left the hotel, a few days later, for her morning stroll. That letter of Doctor Carrol's seemed destined to be the *bête noir* of her life. He would soon leave his room now, and she would be liable at any moment to meet him in hall or corridor, when, if she only had it with her, she would be able to return it to him.

All the morning she had been revolving plans by which it might be sent to her; but none of them had finally proved feasible. It would not do to write to one of the servants to forward it, as

that would rouse their curiosity, and it would not be a difficult matter for any one interested to do so, to learn the contents of that envelope. She could not go for it herself without being subjected to questions from her aunt, which she would be unable to answer ; nor could she think of any one to whom she could entrust such a commission.

It was, she felt, very unfortunate that she had left it ; since, if she only had it now in her possession, she might any day be free of the whole miserable matter. It seemed as if an evil fate had pursued her ever since that letter came into her hands. Why had she been singled out for a trust which had well-nigh robbed her of all peace of mind ? She would bear this burden no longer. If an appeal to the doctor, which she would make on the first opportunity, did not release her, she would lay the whole matter before his wife, as she ought to have done in the first place.

Jessie had now reached one of her favorite haunts ; and here she threw herself down in its leafy seclusion, while mentally formulating her purpose. So absorbed was she in thought, as not to notice that any one was approaching her retreat, till she heard voices in the road just below.

The speaker she knew at once to be Maud Whitney, though she could not see her, and she plainly heard her say :

“She is the most fortunate girl I ever knew. Some people seem to take all the prizes in life. Here she has beauty, wealth, social position, in fact, everything one could desire ; all these, and never a care or a trouble in the world,” Maud was saying.

“Was it nothing to have lost her mother when she was a mere child?”

Jessie recognized this last voice as Mrs. Whitney's, and she was about to make her presence known to mother and daughter when, to her great surprise, she found it was of herself they were speaking.

“What does Jessie Norberry remember of her mother? She was too young to miss her. That loss was more than made up to her in her father. The prestige of his name was no small inheritance. No : fortune has showered everything upon her, even the talisman which brings every one to her feet.”

They had passed on, and for a moment the object of their conversation lay thoughtfully study-

ing the lace-like tracery on her white dress, made by the sunlight falling through the leafy boughs overhead ; then, with a sigh, she said :

“ Jessie Norberry, you have never appreciated yourself or your advantages. ‘ All fortune’s gifts, and not a care or trouble in the world.’ That is as much as we any of us know of one another’s lives,” she mused, rising now to return.

Mrs. Wilson had at first tried to frown down her niece’s former acquaintance. She was not at all pleased at the spirit of good comradeship which seemed fast growing between Jessie and Milton Carrol. That he was simply her townsman did not call for any such evidences of friendship between them. But even this lady’s favor was finally won by the man who carried himself with so perfect a poise as to command the respect of every one who met him.

Still she now and then felt some uneasiness when she saw them so constantly together. Why had such a man sought the seclusion of a town like Newbury ? There he could certainly find no opening for his talents, and that he should from choice spend his life at farming, this lady’s conventional prejudices did not allow her to believe.

He might be all that he seemed, but she determined to write Jessie's guardian, and ascertain if he were indeed a fitting friend for her. But before Mrs. Wilson had carried out this purpose a condition of matters had come about which served to lay at rest any scruples she might have entertained in regard to Mr. Carrol's antecedents ; but of this anon.

CHAPTER VIII.

JESSIE RENEWS HER PROMISE.

WHATEVER had been the occasion of Doctor Carrol's nervous shock, he had quickly recovered from it, and there was nothing afterward to indicate that Reason had not complete possession of her throne while he remained at the Glen. No one meeting him at this time would have suspected he was the victim of dementia ; though it was generally known he was out of health, which accounted for his evident wish for retirement.

The doctor's suite of rooms opened upon one of the piazzas, and here in a shady corner, made by the angle of the house, he seemed to have found a spot which suited his fancy, where, in his easy chair, with a book or paper before him, he read or dozed the greater part of the day.

Coming upon him here one morning, Jessie found the opportunity she had so long sought, of speaking with him alone. After commenting upon the fine view which his position commanded, she at

once broached the subject uppermost in her thoughts.

“Doctor,” she said, “I have wanted for a long time to tell you how the letter, which you gave me last fall, has troubled me. I ought not to have taken it ; but I tried so hard afterward to give it back to you ; for, you see, I am not yet of age, and so am responsible to my guardians. I have no right to assume such a trust, since I could not fulfill it without their consent.” Jessie had spoken rapidly, both from force of feeling, and fearing interruption before she should have explained her position.

But, to her surprise, the doctor heard her through without any attempt at remonstrance. When she had finished, he said quietly :

“Is that all the scruple that you have, child ? You may be a middle-aged woman before you are called upon to execute the trust to which you refer. I am not an old man, though trouble has given me that appearance ; and I may have many years to wait yet before I lay my burden down.”

The doctor spoke sadly, and also as if weary of the matter ; but, raising his eyes, they rested upon

Jessie's face, the pain and pallor of which seemed to move him strongly.

"God forbid that I should lay any part of my burden upon your shoulders, child ; rather consign to the flames the miserable confession which, after all, can never wipe out the wrong done."

While the doctor was speaking, Jessie was seized with deep compunction that she had ever hesitated about what now seemed both a duty and privilege.

"Forgive me, doctor ! I will have no more scruples ; I think I did not realize my trust and privilege. I will gladly give you this assurance : that if I live I will faithfully carry out your wishes in this matter," she said earnestly.

Her words and manner evidently carried conviction of her changed purpose to the doctor's heart, for he uttered a fervent "God bless you !" and presently spoke of other matters as if this were settled.

Jessie did not again allude to the letter in her possession, nor did she allow the secret between them to put any constraint upon her future intercourse with the doctor. But in every way in her power, she strove to show kindness to the man whose trouble had made him sacred in her eyes.

Mrs. Carrol fully appreciated these considerate attentions which were so evidently pleasing to her husband, and which distinguished him as the recipient. For Jessie Norberry's favor was much courted in the house, and those whom she honored with her regard were considered fortunate beyond their fellows.

Mrs. Carrol watched with all a mother's interest her son's growing attachment for Jessie, whom she had herself long loved for her many winning qualities, and whom she earnestly hoped some day to welcome to a daughter's place in her heart.

It was for Jessie's sake that Mrs. Carrol sought to be friends with Mrs. Wilson ; and the latter's armor of reserve was not long proof against the genuine womanly grace and kindness of spirit which distinguished the doctor's wife. To know Mrs. Carrol was to love and trust her, notwithstanding the quiet dignity which forbade any overstepping of the bounds which she might herself lay down.

Not only did the doctor's wife commend herself to Mrs. Wilson's judgment, as in every respect a lady, but she soon came to fill her conception of a grand woman. So, it is hardly necessary to add,

she did not trouble herself about Milton Carrol's antecedents while she was daily growing to love and honor his mother.

Though Mrs. Wilson's health had much improved, there were still days when she shut herself away from every one, unless it was the doctor's wife. In her sympathy she found a subtle sweetness, no less pleasant for being new to her. For, though Mrs. Carrol herself possessed a fine healthy physique, she was sufficiently acquainted with disease to know that Mrs. Wilson's trouble was one of the least understood of any of the ills to which human flesh is heir; and, while the former was physically unconscious of possessing nerves, she knew her poor friend was often sensible of little else.

Jessie soon noticed that her aunt came more quickly than formerly out of these attacks of pain, and the girl felt convinced that her kind friend had much to do with this improvement.

One day when Mrs. Wilson had shut herself up with a severe headache, affirming her inability to sit up for a moment, Jessie was surprised to find her, the latter part of the afternoon, enjoying the breeze on the piazza, and discussing, with a group

of ladies, a projected excursion for the following day.

But Jessie felt that her aunt's sudden recovery was explained when Martha told her that a few moments after her aunt had dismissed her from the sick-room, Mrs. Carrol had come in and spent the morning with the invalid. That there is nothing like change of place and thought for nervous pain, the doctor's wife had had many occasions to prove, and she urged her experience with faithful persistence in Mrs. Wilson's case.

As Jessie passed her friend at the tea-table that evening, she stopped and whispered in her ear, —

“I have always suspected, Mrs. Carrol, that you were a sorceress, and now I am sure of it; but I will tell no one if you will teach me your art.” To which Mrs. Carrol laughingly responded: “Ah, leave me my one gift. You are sufficiently endowed already; with any more arts you would be dangerous.”

“Then you own to having practised your spells upon aunty? But look at her now! Who would believe that only this morning she was giving out sick-room orders for a week.”

CHAPTER IX.

NEARLY A DENOUEMENT.

THE young people in the hotel were planning to spend a night on Mt. Washington, in order to have the much vaunted experience of seeing the sun rise from that height, and for more than a week this projected excursion had been the main topic of interest among them.

Having made the ascent of this mountain once during the summer, Jessie declined joining this party, thinking it would trouble her aunt if she were away for the night. But her friends were not willing to leave her behind, so they changed their plans somewhat, and invited several of the older ladies to chaperone them, and among others Mrs. Wilson, before whom they laid the matter, declaring that all their pleasure would be spoiled if she and her niece were not of the company.

Whether she was most moved by the flattery which would have had her believe her presence indispensable on this occasion, or the desire to

give Jessie a surprise and pleasure, as she affirmed, it is certain she promised to go.

“Why, Aunt, you cannot mean it. You would not be able to bear the fatigue which would be sure to bring on one of your headaches,” Jessie exclaimed, on learning her aunt’s design, but with strange persistency the latter adhered to her purpose, though half regretting having made it.

The party bade fair to be a gay one, and every arrangement that could conduce to their comfort was amply made. The young people were to accomplish the ascent on horseback, leaving their elders to the easier, but less romantic journey by the carriage road.

The morning proved auspicious, and the party left the Glen in high spirits. With the exception of a slight shower when about half-way up the mountain, nothing occurred to mar the pleasure of the ascent. A few hours later hampers were unpacked in the Tip-Top House, whose walls, perhaps, never echoed to a jollier crowd of revellers than those who now broke a five hours’ fast.

A glorious sunset, whose rosy light made a gorgeous panorama of mountain, vale and forest, was witnessed by the party, and not till the luminary

had entirely disappeared from sight, and grotesque shadows were stealing abroad, did any one feel inclined to go indoors. A roaring wood fire lit up the grim old room, where sets were soon formed for dancing, and presently the whole company, with one or two exceptions, entered heartily into this amusement.

The altitude of their surroundings seemed to have an exhilarating effect upon the party, for spirits, which two hours before had flagged from bodily weariness, now apparently rose superior to the law of physics.

A little after midnight, Mr. Carrol proposed to Jessie that they go out and take a peep at Nature, in the weird solitude of the hour and place, and she having wearied of dancing, welcomed the change at once. A moment later they quitted the house with a few friends whom they had asked to join them, — Henry Germaine, and his sister and betrothed.

“I think the world must have looked like this to Noah when he left the ark,” said Jessie, as she stepped out into the night. “This might be Mount Ararat, and here, I am sure, are the waters, while we are the only remnant of our kind.”

The girl's vivid imagination had instantly evoked this picture, which was indeed borne out by the surroundings, presenting as they did a fair representation of that scene of chaos ; for though the atmosphere was clear on the summit, clouds lay all below it, and these billowy-looking masses of vapor could be compared to nothing but the waves of the sea. In fact, a boundless ocean seemed to lie all about them, while a crescent moon lit up the scene, throwing into strong relief the little group, and the old ark of shelter they had just quitted.

The feeling of isolation from the rest of the world was for a moment terribly real to the whole party, impressed as they were by the solitude and strangeness of the scene.

"I must have aunty come out a moment ; she should not lose this," Jessie said, stepping back into the house a moment after leaving it.

Mrs. Wilson somewhat reluctantly yielded to her niece's entreaties to put a shawl about her and come out ; but when she had done so she seemed more impressed by the coldness of the atmosphere than the strange phenomena Nature presented, and presently, making the plea that she would

certainly have an attack of neuralgia if she stayed a moment longer, returned to the house again.

“How awfully grand it is,” was Jessie’s ejaculation, after standing a moment wrapped in contemplation.

“Yes, grand almost to fearfulness,” returned her companion ; and added, “some people would tell us we were tempting Fate to stand here ; that it is uncanny to seek to gaze upon Nature in her primeval retreat.”

“Her loving children have certainly nothing to fear from her, and it is only to them that she reveals herself,” was Jessie’s rejoinder.

The rest of the party had strolled on, but their voices could plainly be heard by the two who had stood for a moment lost in the grandeur of the scene :

“How the particles of mica glisten in the moonlight. Our mother earth has adorned herself with all her gems to-night.” A moment later Jessie stooped to gather a cluster of mountain daisies which had caught her eye, and which she gayly affirmed she would keep as a memento of this night. Seeing more of these delicate white blossoms just beyond, and thinking to complete her

bouquet with them, she sprang toward the spot, and the next instant, with a stifled scream, she had disappeared as completely as if the mountain had opened and swallowed her up.

"The ground had seemed to give way beneath her feet, and she found herself sliding down, down, without the power to stop or even cry out. In another moment she would probably have lost all consciousness from fright, but her course was suddenly checked. A clump of bushes had stayed her feet. Then she heard, as if far away, a cheering voice bidding her not to be frightened, and the assurance that she was safe. Then a pair of strong arms were about her, and she was lifted from the perilous spot, and carried, she could never afterward tell how, to a place of safety.

"Are you sure you can stand? I think you had better not try," said the same kindly voice, and presently she found herself sitting on the firm earth, where her preserver had placed her.

Milton Carrol had never won a greater victory over himself than when he conquered the desire to fold this girl to his heart with the uttered endearment which sprang to his lips.

"Now you can take breath. Thank God, it is

still left to you," he said fervently, as he put her out of his arms.

"I think I was faint for a moment, but I am all right now," were Jessie's first words when speech and volition returned to her, and then, noting her companion's solicitude, she made a brave effort to command her still quivering nerves, and recovered herself sufficiently to speak calmly of her late peril, and his quick and valorous rescue of her.

Milton Carrol could only feel thankful that he had resisted the weakness which would have betrayed his heart, since he felt sure it would have distressed and pained her; for, in the sweet face raised to his own, was only to be read gratitude for his kindness. The fact that for a moment her head had lain upon his shoulder, and her heart beat near his own, did not make her now shrink from his glance.

"I am sorry to have so frightened you. But really I am not hurt. Do not feel in the least anxious about me."

As she spoke, Jessie was wiping from her hands the loose earth that still clung to them.

"If you had been hurt I should never have forgiven myself. I cannot think of your escape with-

out a shudder, and I shall always blame myself that I did not take better care of you."

"Oh! please do not look at it that way. You make me ashamed of my carelessness; and pray do not tell aunty, for it would be sure to give her a shock. There she is now, looking for us."

As Jessie spoke Mr. Carrol turned and saw Mrs. Wilson's face pressed against the window pane.

"I will go and speak to her; evidently she is anxious about me," Jessie said, rising; but though she had thought herself sufficiently recovered to carry out this purpose, she was glad of the friendly arm offered, for without its support her limbs would hardly have obeyed the bidding of her will.

"We are coming in presently, Aunty," she called out as they came near the house; for Mrs. Wilson had raised the window on seeing them.

"Why, where have you been?" she exclaimed, on their coming into view, calling Jessie's attention to her wrap, which was covered with yellow mould.

"This is only the natural result of an intimate acquaintance with mother earth," was Mr. Carrol's response. "Miss Jessie has been sitting in the maternal lap, and has brought away evidence of our good mother's embrace."

A grateful glance from his companion amply rewarded him for the effort he had made to divert her aunt's attention, and which seemed to have the desired effect, as Mrs. Wilson said no more about the matter, but suggested that they should come in at once.

This Jessie would have done, but Mr. Carrol urged waiting for their friends; for he saw that her nervous agitation would be likely to betray just what he knew she wished to conceal, namely, that something had happened to disturb her greatly.

"Our friends must return presently, and then we will all go in together," he said, hoping that thus any unusual nervousness on Jessie's part might escape notice.

But he at once made an effort to brush the fresh mould from her wrap, that it might not further betray her, and ere this was accomplished the voices of their late companions met their ears.

"Why! Where have you been all this time?" Henry Germaine called out as he caught sight of Mr. Carrol and Jessie.

"Where have we been? You had better answer that question for yourselves," was Mr. Car-

rol's response. "Miss Jessie and I have just come from the house" (so they had from that direction). "It did not take us many moments to become disgusted with a midnight ramble up here in the clouds. We were looking for you now, and had about come to the conclusion that you had gone back to the Glen."

Henry Germaine laughed. "We just walked down the road a short distance. It was too cold to stand still, and we thought you would follow. When you did not, I thought something had happened."

"You did not think we had fallen into one of these gorges without making any outcry to alarm our friends, did you? We are heroic and self-sacrificing to the last degree, but we should hardly do that."

This banter seemed to have the desired effect of dissipating from his friend's mind any suspicion of their having been detained by a mishap, and satisfied himself that Jessie's cry had not been heard.

Now that her secret would be safe, he was ready to go in, and a moment later was leading the way to the house.

To Germaine's jest that he expected mountain-dew would be at a premium on the morrow, Jessie laughingly replied, that she had not thought of making a corner in the same, or she would not so carelessly have lost the blossoms she had gathered.

On her way to the house she found an opportunity to thank Mr. Carrol for so thoughtfully screening her mishap from their companions; for to have been the object of their commiseration would have been the keenest torture to her sensitive nature.

"You owe me no thanks, Miss Jessie; you long ago cancelled any favor I might do you, by your kindness to my father; and besides, this accident would not have come about had I been equal to my trust," was the gallant response.

Before the days of steam on Mt. Washington, persons spending the night on the summit, made little account of sleeping away any of its hours. The present company at least had no thought of doing so, and when interest in dancing had died out, blind-man's-buff, forfeits, and other games followed, till the night was past, and sunrise heralded.

Warm wraps were then in demand, and the greater part of the company went out-of-doors to

witness the ascent of old Sol into the heavens, from the low-lying fog and vapor, which gave him the appearance of rising out of the sea. Not a cold, dark expanse of water, but a gold and amber sea through which the form of the great luminary could be faintly descried before its rim shot into sight. For the little party on the summit had witnessed the miracle of a second sunrise, when the great orb of day appeared above the sea of mist and vapor which bounded their horizon.

It was now bitterly cold, the temperature having fallen several degrees since daylight ; so after having seen the sun fairly started on his day's journey through the heavens, the party were glad to get indoors again, to the hot coffee and breakfast, which now awaited them.

Jessie was not a little surprised to find her aunt moving actively about, assisting in the preparations. Evidently she was feeling none the worse for her night's dissipation ; the novel experience of being without her maid (for she had left Martha at the hotel) seemed to make her forget the conventionalities to which she had been so long tied, for she was entering heartily into the spirit of merriment that presided over this impromptu meal.

Before leaving the summit for their descent, Jessie visited the scene of her accident, and on seeing the spot by daylight was surprised that the distance of her fall was so much less than she had supposed.

It proved to be a growth of scrubby bushes which had intercepted it, but these were the only vegetation about. Had they not been strong enough to have held her she would, perhaps, have gone on the jagged rocks below.

"Why, it seemed such a long way that I went down! I felt I would never stop," she said, turning with a nervous shiver from the spot which had been so full of peril to her. "I don't see how you came to me so quickly, and much less how you got me up again."

"I think you were hardly conscious when I reached you, for you did not speak till I had you half-way up, then you said something about putting me to trouble. It was such a relief to hear your voice that I think at that moment I could have climbed the Himalayas with you."

"I am glad you were not put to the test," returned Jessie, smiling.

He did not tell her that he had only that morn-

ing repeated what she seemed to think a great climbing feat, for a cluster of wilted daisies, from which he had tenderly brushed the mould, and which for many a day he would keep as a precious memento of herself.

Soon after starting on their descent, Mr. Carrol found that one of the fore shoes of his horse was loose. He tightened it as well as he could, and for the first mile went along very well; then his horse began slipping. He was thinking seriously of removing the shoe altogether, when the animal stumbled and came down upon his knees, at the same time bringing his rider's shoulder in violent contact with one of the immense rocks which here overhung the narrow path. The next moment he was lying senseless in the road, where he had fallen.

As it happened, Mr. Germaine was the only person who witnessed this accident, he being directly behind his friend, while the rest of the party were ahead. Jumping from his horse, he tenderly raised the head of the prostrate man, fearing that the blow had killed him. On being moved, Mr. Carrol opened his eyes, and seemed at once to comprehend what had happened.

"I am all right," he said, attempting to rise, but the next moment, with a stifled groan, he had fallen back in a faint.

"I am afraid that arm is broken."

Dismay was pictured on Germaine's face as he examined the member which had fallen limp at the unconscious man's side.

To have help was the first thing necessary, and Germaine shouted to those ahead to stop.

Before any one could reach them, Mr. Carrol again revived, and declared his injury confined to his right arm; but that was indeed broken, as his friend had feared.

What was to be done? Help could not be rendered here. Evidently there could be no relief for the sufferer till he was got home, which must be done as quickly as possible. The injured member was, after some delay, confined in a sling, and then various methods were suggested for his transit.

Meanwhile his horse was pawing the ground with his loosened shoe, and whinnying as if trying to explain why he had thrown his master, by drawing attention to his own disability.

"I know it, poor fellow, you were not to blame,"

said the injured man, who called the beast to him, and with a few kindly strokes of the shapely head, seemed to reassure him that it was all right.

Of course the animal could not be mounted again by his master, whose avoirdupois greatly added to the exigencies of the case. After several attempts, however, his friends succeeded in getting him upon Germaine's horse, and that gentleman insisted upon leading the animal, whose every motion was evidently a torture to the sufferer.

Mr. Carrol's horse, whose shoe had been removed, was also led by one of the party, and in this way they proceeded down the mountain.

Though no groan escaped the injured man, his friends who kept a constant watch upon him, and noted the occasionally sudden paling of his cheek, and the lines about his mouth growing hard and tense, felt they would be only too thankful when the descent should be accomplished.

A level road would have tested his powers of endurance in no small degree; but the ruts and jutting boulders of the old bridle path made equestrianism trying in the best estate.

"Don't faint, old boy, and land in one of these gulches; for we might not be able to fish you out

again," Germaine said with ill-assumed nonchalance when they started ; but he soon saw that his friend's powerful will and iron nerve would carry him through.

And so it proved, for when they reached the hotel, Milton Carrol even found strength to walk to his mother's room, lest she should be alarmed by hearing of his accident from others.

"I suppose I have brought you home a broken arm, mother, as a souvenir of Mt. Washington ; and it had best be attended to before my father knows anything about it. Dr. Ellis will be in presently. I have sent for him," he said, as if announcing the most indifferent fact.

The delay in setting the broken bone had considerably aggravated the case, and it was some days before Mr. Carrol was able to leave his room ; but he finally exchanged this seclusion for his mother's private parlor, where he received the visits of sympathizing friends.

"Oh ! I shall be about again in a few days," he said to those who were disposed to condole with him on his disability ; but the few days passed, and still he did not quit his retirement, though the broken arm was doing well.

A term of unpropitious weather about this time kept every one in-doors, and Jessie spent most of her time in Mrs. Carrol's room. Perhaps the secret of the invalid's being in no haste to get about again lay in the above fact. Very certain it is that if for any reason she was later than usual in her daily visit, or happened to be called away, as was not infrequently the case, he grew restless and moody at once, a condition which disappeared immediately when Jessie entered.

They were reading together some of the old English and French authors, and more than one lively discussion arose between them over these works. Jessie was keenly alive intellectually, and though religious in her nature, her mind was disposed to speculation; and her spiritual intuition and acumen often surprised her companion, giving him a glimpse of a nature rarely pure and gifted.

But while finding that she grew daily dearer to him, as he learned better to appreciate her character, he was more and more convinced that her pleasure in his society was a purely intellectual one; that in their delightful chats her mind simply found the stimulus of friction, and in this fact lay his chief and only attraction for her.

He often found himself envying the man to whom he believed she had given her heart. But the better he became acquainted with Jessie the more puzzled was he that a girl of her gay, exuberant spirit should fancy a person like Doctor Forney ; a brilliant icicle, as he mentally termed his supposed rival.

It must be that she had been captivated by the doctor's acquirements and position, as a man of learning and letters. These would naturally have a great attraction for one who valued intellectual gifts as she did ; but would these things satisfy her heart ?

Would this girl who was all feeling, who would live in her affections, be happy with one so entirely her opposite ? Milton Carrol thought he knew her better than she knew herself ; and his heart cried out at the sacrifice. The temptation to try and save her from such a mistake, even though her salvation should work him no weal, was often strong upon him.

CHAPTER X.

A NEW LEAF TURNED.

THE last of October found Mrs. Wilson and her niece back in Boston, where, after their late residence with Nature, the city seemed cramped and close, and to shut them in like a wall.

"I will go to Newbury next week. Perhaps they are only waiting for me to signify a desire to come home, since I am no longer a child to be sent back and forth at another's will. They have been leaving me the choice, and I have been blind not to see it in that light," was Jessie's thought, when the question as to what she was to do with herself presented itself.

When she made known this decision to her Aunt Wilson, that lady begged she would not go at once ; and she seemed so troubled at the thought of losing her, that Jessie felt constrained to yield to her wishes, though she at once wrote her aunt Kitty that she might look for her early in November.

Mrs. Wilson had ere this realized that Jessie's indisposition of the spring and early summer, had been occasioned by the narrow, restricted life she had led, and that she would never endure another such season. If she were to succeed in keeping Jessie with her, it was evident she must bring some life into her house; accordingly, before they had been two weeks at home, Mrs. Wilson wrote Carrie Winter, inviting her to come and spend the next few months with them. She knew her niece's friend was desirous of taking music lessons of a certain artist in the profession, and as this would give her the opportunity, she did not doubt the girl would gladly avail herself of it.

And so it proved: but that young lady was scarcely a fortnight in the city when Mrs. Wilson's house was turned completely upside down; for that lady had given her niece *carte blanche*, and Jessie's first use of her power was to refurnish some of the grim old rooms, which soon presented so cheerful and bright an appearance that its mistress hardly felt at home in them.

Its mistress, we said, but Mrs. Wilson was no longer the ordering spirit of her home; for she had given the *menage* also entirely into the hands

of her two young visitors, who were playing at housekeeping in a high-handed original way that nearly sent the servants distracted. Meals were ordered at unprecedented hours, while the house overflowed with bright young company.

"Jessie, you remember Mr. Carrol is to be in town this week, and I invited him here to dine Thursday, though I believe I did not mention it to you. What do you think of asking Doctor Forney and his sister to meet him?" Mrs. Wilson asked, looking closely at her niece as she put this question.

"Was it this week he was to be in town? I had forgotten. Yes; if you have invited him it would be well to ask some one else, and I believe Doctor Carrol and Doctor Forney's father were old friends."

Jessie spoke, as her aunt thought, quite indifferently. Was it possible she had forgotten Mr. Carrol was to be in the city that week?

Mrs. Wilson had often of late questioned in her mind whether there had really been anything, after all, between her niece and the doctor's son, as she had supposed. Jessie had parted from Mr. Carrol as she had from other pleasant summer friends, and

her aunt was confident there had been no communication between them since.

This morning she decided that she must have been mistaken in supposing that there had been, and dismissed the matter with a sense of relief. Jessie could do better than to marry the doctor's son. She was born to grace a different position from what a plain farmer could give her, even though that farmer were Milton Carrol.

That same afternoon Jessie and her friend were on their way to Professor Roselle's, for their music lesson, when they met Doctor Forney.

"Miss Jessie, I was just wishing I could see you," the doctor said, after a cordial greeting to her and her friend, whom he had several times met. "I was even contemplating, this very moment, how I could find time to call on you before to-morrow evening ; for I have tickets for Madame Parodi's concert, which I want you and Miss Winter should use."

It seemed the doctor had secured tickets to this concert some time in advance, and now his sister, and the friend who had expected to accompany her, would not be able to go.

If Jessie and her friend Carrie would allow him

to call for them on the evening in question, it would give him great pleasure to do so.

The doctor's very cordial invitation they could not decline, though it would have pleased Jessie better had he not offered himself as their escort.

"If he would have allowed us to come down in the carriage, and then met us at the hall, it would have been just as well ; and would have saved himself a good deal of trouble. Waiting upon young ladies, I fancy, is hardly in the doctor's way, and I don't believe but that it is a bother to him," she said, with a slight tone of annoyance, when he had left them.

"Well, if it isn't in his way, it ought to be ; he should be waiting upon his daughters by this time. But since he has none of his own, the least he can do is to wait upon other men's daughters," was Carrie Winter's merry rejoinder. "I don't believe it is a very great trial to him, either ; but I think it was ever so nice of him to ask us. I wanted to go to that concert so much, but did not expect an escort would be forthcoming," she added, with native frankness.

"A gentleman to see you, Miss." Jessie was just rising from their late dinner, the following

day, when this message was brought her. Going to the parlor, she found Mr. Carrol standing before one of Corot's loveliest twilights, so lost in contemplation of the picture, that he did not hear her till she spoke.

"Why, good afternoon, Mr. Carrol," she said, with evident pleasure; and then, "I see you were admiring one of my favorites.

"Yes," he returned, releasing the hand she had given him. "Corot's handling of such scenes is wonderful. This is silver-toned almost to weirdness, suggesting something of the supernatural." Then, turning from the picture, he inquired how Jessie's health had been since her return from the mountains. "But I need not ask," he added, drawing his chair nearer to her. "You evidently have not been pining in your exile," quoting one of her own pleasantries in which he had heard her refer to her indisposition of the previous spring.

"No; I have been well. The exile has become reconciled to her banishment," she returned, with one of the rare bright glances he remembered so well. "But how is everybody at home? I did not think when I left the mountains to stay away from Newbury so long."

"But pleasure has held you captive in her chains," Mr. Carrol interposed, with a smile which was perhaps the least bit cynical.

"Yes; one thing after another has seemed to prevent my going to Newbury, and now my friend Carrie Winter is here. But tell me everything that has happened. Have you seen the boys lately? and how are your father and mother?"

"Yes; I saw your cousins only yesterday, and they sent a great deal of love to you, with the injunction that you were to come home directly or they would come and bring you. My mother is very well, and sent kind remembrances; but I am sorry to say my father has not justified our hopes for him. He does not go out now, and is apparently losing strength." An anxious, careworn expression crossed Mr. Carrol's face while speaking of his father.

"I am sorry to hear that. He seemed so well during the summer." Jessie spoke absently, and Mr. Carrol at once changed the subject, but he was recalled to it a moment later by her asking if there had been any return of his father's mental malady.

Jessie had hesitated before asking this question ;

but she wished very much to satisfy her mind on this matter.

“No, he has not had any return of that trouble ; his mind seems clear. He has apparently forgotten his old hallucination, for it is months now since he has spoken of it.”

For a few moments after this Jessie was strangely abstracted ; then she seemed to rally her wandering thoughts, and was again her old vivacious self.

When Mr. Carrol finally accused her of having deserted old friends for new, she laughingly replied that she was only testing them, as she wished to prove if they would be really glad to have her back again.

“But it is too bad to punish Allan and Roger,” she added ; “I know they really miss me, and since I cannot go home at present, I must have them here for a visit. I wonder I had not thought of it before. I know aunty will try and endure their invasion for a week.”

This reminded Mr. Carrol to inquire for Mrs. Wilson’s health.

“Aunty has been quite a marvel to me since she came home. You would hardly believe what

a difference the summer has made in her health and habits. Why, she goes about quite like other people now. I will speak to her, for she would be disappointed not to see you. I believe she is counting upon a visit from you while here."

Ringling the bell for a servant, Jessie added, "I shall have to beg you to excuse me, Mr. Carrol, for I have an engagement this evening. Carrie and myself are going to hear Madame Parodi. Perhaps you were intending to go to the concert?"

"No; I was not fortunate enough to get a ticket; they have all been sold for several days," Mr. Carrol returned; "but I am glad you are to have such a treat. I heard Parodi when she was here before, and then her voice was exquisite. But do not let me detain you. I will stay a moment and see Mrs. Wilson, and then I will go back to the hotel, as I expect a friend to call upon me this evening."

Jessie quitted the room a few moments after her aunt entered, for she found on consulting her watch that she had no time to spare if she would not keep the doctor waiting. So quickly exchanging her dinner dress for a black silk, she donned her street garments, and as she entered one door of

the parlor to take leave of Mr. Carrol, Doctor Forney was shown in by another.

Introductions followed, and the doctor expressed himself pleased to meet the son of his father's old friend. If Mr. Carrol found less pleasure in this encounter, he was at least his own courteous self.

Some fifteen minutes later when he left Mrs. Wilson's house, he had promised to dine with her the following day.

He would now have the opportunity he had desired of seeing Jessie and the doctor together, when he was sure he could judge something of the relation in which they stood to each other. If she loved him, her naturally impulsive nature was sure to betray it in some way ; and with this knowledge Milton Carrol felt it would be easier to surrender all hope of her himself.

But if on the contrary he saw any reason to think that her heart was not wholly given to this man, he would not leave the city without declaring himself, and making an effort to win her.

CHAPTER XI.

THWARTED PURPOSES.

TELEGRAM, sir ; came just after you went out," was the salutation Mr. Carrol met as he entered the Tremont House, where he always stopped when in the city.

Hastily tearing off the envelope, he learned that his father had been suddenly taken ill, and his mother feared the worst, and desired his immediate return.

"Has any one inquired for me?" he asked of the messenger boy who still lingered.

"No, sir ; I have been right here, and I haven't seen any one."

One glance at the office clock had shown Mr. Carrol that he would not have time to catch the eight o'clock train, as it was now nearly that time ; he must wait for the later one.

"Can I do anything for you, sir?" The boy had waited for his customary tip, and as it was not

forthcoming, had thought the gentleman needed reminding.

"No — yes! Wait here. You may carry a letter when I have written it," Mr. Carrol said, turning to the clerk's desk.

The first thing to be done was to send a telegram to his mother, telling her that he would come on the midnight express. The next to write a note to Mrs. Wilson, explaining his inability to keep his engagement on the morrow.

After dispatching the messenger with this note and making his preparations to leave the city, Mr. Carrol found that he still had considerable time upon his hands, which in his present restless mood he would gladly have annihilated.

A few moments later he was watching the crowd as it poured out of Music Hall, which had been densely packed by the admirers of the great singer. If he had come here hoping to get another sight of the fair face which haunted all his thoughts, he was rewarded; for, in crossing the sidewalk to her carriage, Jessie passed so near him that the sleeve of her velvet cloak touched his arm. But she was talking with the doctor about the evening's entertainment, and took no cognizance of the dark earnest

eyes which in that brief moment flashed in admiration upon her.

Stopping long enough to see the doctor take leave of Jessie and her friend, after putting them into the carriage, Milton Carrol turned and walked rapidly in the direction of the station. But he took with him the remembrance of the bright, beautiful face whose dazzling fairness had been enhanced by the sombre but elegant hat and cloak which had been a fit setting for it.

But he also took with him another remembrance, that of the fortune which made this girl independent, and which now seemed to widen the distance between them.

In Newbury Jessie had always dressed simply ; he had forgotten to associate with her the bonds and bank stock which had been her inheritance.

Jessie's fortune had come to her from her mother ; for Allan Norberry had been too devoted to his literary pursuits to amass money. His treasures were purely mental, and these he could not bequeath in pounds, shillings and pence to his orphan child ; but, happily, her mother's fortune had prevented his daughter from being dependent upon her relatives.

Milton Carrol, we say, remembered this, and it proved to be the last feather that turned the scale against him.

He knew that the Norberrys were very proud of their old family name, and that they would look high for the daughter of its most honored son. Doubtless they would favor a match with Doctor Forney, whose fortune was equal to her own ; and who could give her the social position she was entitled to hold. While, on the other hand, what had he to offer her? Nothing but his love ; not even an untarnished name.

When Jessie returned from the concert she found her aunt in quite a dismal state of mind over the note she had that evening received.

"It's too bad, Aunt, but Mr. Carrol will be coming up again. You will have another opportunity to bring him and the doctor together," she said, trying to console her aunt for what was evidently quite a disappointment.

"Yes ; but Doctor Forney will come, of course, and it will be so stupid and awkward for him to find himself the only gentleman," returned her aunt ruefully.

"If he does, he can easily make some excuse

and escape. I don't see that we can help it now," responded Jessie, who seemingly did not share her aunt's annoyance.

"Who ever heard of any man finding a good dinner stupid. I thought they were generally very interesting occasions to them. Or is the learned doctor in the habit of feasting only on the nectar of the gods, that the food of common mortals is liable to disturb his digestion? Don't fear, Mrs. Wilson," Carrie Winter gayly added; "leave him to me, and I will see that he does not have a fit of *ennui* over his dinner."

If the doctor were ever a victim to this disorder, he was certainly not afflicted with it on this occasion, for he seemed to thoroughly enjoy this dining *en famille* with his friends, though he expressed regret that he was not to further his acquaintance with Mr. Carrol, which would have given him pleasure; and showed not a little solicitude on learning of Doctor Carrol's sudden illness.

While Jessie engaged Miss Forney in conversation, her lively friend Carrie had taken the doctor by storm with some of her pet theories, and presently was enlarging upon the abject state of helplessness to which woman had been brought by her

long dependence upon man. But she expressed the belief that the happy day was not far distant when her weak and enfeebled sex would rise up and throw off the conventional shackles which had so long bound them, and prove themselves equal to standing alone.

Jessie saw the gleam of mischief in her friend's eye, and knew she had thrown this bomb for the fun of the explosion, being well aware of the doctor's decided conservatism.

Whether it was that he also understood this, or that the graceful audacity of his fair assailant amused and interested him, it would be hard to say; he laughed heartily, though he did not disdain to take up the cudgels in defense of his opinions.

"Do you think women will be happier under the new regime? or better wives and mothers?" he asked with a smile.

"Yes; a thousand times happier if they have any spirit," returned the girl quickly. "As to their being better wives and mothers, a great proportion of women never are wives and mothers, but those who are will certainly never be the worse for standing on an equality of independence with their husbands and sons."

Carrie Winter had been careful to use none of the terms which are obnoxious from association, and her eyes now plainly said, "Gainsay that if you can."

Evidently the doctor did not care to attempt this, but he made answer :

"I think some one has said that freedom is in the air, and that our women breathe in its spirit with their breath. I am inclined to think it is so, for here is Harriet, who has always been my docile and obedient pupil, often giving expression to sentiments she never learned from me ; talking about the enfranchisement of women, as if the fulfilment of all prophecy were only waiting for this."

"And who knows that it is not?" interposed his sister. "I do not mean to imply that all this depends upon the ballot being given them," she added, "but when women are really enfranchised from the petty, narrow life they have heretofore too often led, and realize the grand possibilities which are opening up to them, who shall say that the dawn of the millenium has not come?"

Without seeming to notice his sister's question, the doctor continued, —

"I do not see but that women now have all the

real privileges which men enjoy, without the responsibilities and demands which fall upon men. To me they seem happily exempt in this respect."

"Yes, they do have some privileges. My friend Jessie here has the privilege of paying a yearly tax which perhaps one man in fifty may average, for the support of the laws which she can have no voice in making. If that tax were collected of me," Carrie went on, "it should be at some trouble to those who collected it. If I paid it, it would be under protest every time, and those who received it should have the consciousness of doing a mean and unfair thing ; for I should feel it was a duty I owed to all other women so situated, to put it in this light."

Jessie had not intended to be brought into this discussion, since she did not endorse all her friend's radical views on this point, nor was she ready to take the other side of the question, but she now made answer, —

"I have no doubt, Carrie, that in my place you would have set a much more worthy example, for I am afraid I have never given much thought to the duty you speak of ;" then, smiling at the doctor as she quoted his words, she added, "My uncle has

met all such demands for me, and happily I have been exempt from any responsibility in the matter."

At this moment Mrs. Wilson gave the signal for rising, and thus put an end to the conversation which she knew had become too personal to suit the taste of her niece.

Jessie had feared that her friend's ultra views might have a tendency to make her lose caste with the doctor, but it did not so appear, for several times afterward he deferred to her opinion in a way that was at least flattering, when his years and erudition were considered. Evidently he was in no way repelled, but rather drawn toward this girl, whose gay, *insouciant* manner seemed to have piqued his interest and curiosity.

"Carrie, you have certainly made a conquest of the doctor to-night. I never saw him so entertaining. What did you do to so wake him up?" Jessie said when she found herself alone with her friend after their guests had gone.

"Oh! I just tried to prevent his feeling dull and bored, as I promised your aunt. Then you think I succeeded?"

"You certainly succeeded in pleasing him,

though I suspect he thinks you the least bit strong-minded."

"Yes ; he is sure to do that, but he is not half the old fossil I thought him ; though he is pretty well encased in his shell of conservatism. 'Wives and mothers' indeed ; as if women had nothing else to do in this world but to be wives and mothers. I wanted to ask him why he had not helped some good woman to fulfil her destiny, if he thinks they have no other," was Carrie's spirited animadversion upon the sentiment which had most provoked her ire.

CHAPTER XII.

PICTURES IN THE FIRE.

ALLEN and Roger Norberry came to Boston with their father the following week, and from her unclé Jessie learned that Doctor Carrol was better. He had had a stroke of paralysis, but seemed likely to recover the use of his limbs, which he had partially lost. Even this was better than the return of his old malady which Jessie had feared.

Allan and Roger were to stay a week in the city, and it was soon apparent that they would not be at a loss how to put in the time. Allan declared his intention of visiting all the shipping in the harbor, after which he proposed to explore the Arsenal and Navy Yard, the Cradle of Liberty and Bunker Hill ; for, as he said, " It would never do for a grammar-school boy to visit Boston without seeing the spot where Warren fell ;" though his curiosity seemed to centre about the Cradle.

Roger was modestly content to divide his time

between the cabs and omnibuses, and the candy stores.

Jessie had never found it hard to control her cousins before, but either they had now outgrown her, or the city had completely turned their heads, for she was soon at her wits' end to know what to do with them.

If in the house, they drove Mrs. Wilson nearly distracted with their noise ; and when turned loose upon the Common they were soon not to be found short of the station house, where they were sure to turn up as lost children.

Their cousin had taken them to picture galleries, toy stores, orphan asylums, and the Museum. Climbed to the cupola of the State House to satisfy their piscatorial curiosity in regard to the reservoir, bought them candy at Copeland's till she feared for them acute gastritis, and still these young cormorants cried, "More, more !"

A week sufficed to exhaust Jessie's patience as well as her stock of amusements, and when the time came for them to go home she was not loath to part with them. But one would have thought they were to escape from "durance vile," to have heard their uproarious welcome of the announce-

ment that they were to go home. The country was at once voted sixteen times better than the city, though how much this had to do with the greater restrictions indoors, Jessie did not know.

They couldn't see what Cousin Jessie wanted to stay in old Boston for; Newbury was a great deal nicer in their opinion: and then, papa and mamma and Baby were there. It seemed as if they could hardly wait to get home to see the latter.

Roger asked his cousin if she s'posed little Bert had growed up big while they were gone. To which Allan, in his superior knowledge, replied: "No, course not; fellers don't grow up big in a week. Do they, Cousin Jess?"

Jessie told them she had never known such a case, and that she thought they would find Baby Bertie just as they had left him.

After putting them in the care of the conductor who was to see them home, she sent a kiss by each to the small man who was king of all hearts in the parsonage, and as the train whisked out of the station, and she caught the last glimpse of two bright faces pressed against the window-pane, Jessie was conscious of a feeling of regret that she was not going with them.

Carrie Winter's visit was prolonged far into January, but she had been gone now several weeks, and still Jessie lingered in the city. She had become so interested in her music under Professor Roselle's system, that she had not felt willing to give it up when her friend left. Early in the winter, too, she had joined a society for mutual improvement. Their meetings were held weekly at the houses of the members, and the ground gone over in history and poetry was something considerable. Through Jessie's persuasions, Doctor Forney had been induced to take the leadership of this class, and she felt herself pledged to stand by it until it should disband in the spring.

Since she was apparently enjoying herself and making so good improvement of her time, her Newbury relatives had hesitated to recall her, and with the exception of a hasty visit which her uncle and aunt had made her about New Year's, she had seen no one from the old town.

Though Doctor Carrol was now quite comfortable again, his family knew that another attack was to be expected at any time, and Milton Carrol had not been from home since recalled by his father's illness.

Among Jessie's friends this winter she did not count a more pleasant one than Doctor Forney. It was no uncommon thing now for him to drop in unexpectedly at any time of day; and more than once he had taken dinner with herself and aunt in the most informal way. He seemed to enjoy so much being received by them in this manner, that they soon dispensed with all ceremony, and looked for his daily visit as quite a matter of course.

There was always some concert, reading or art exhibit to which he had tickets, and which he begged to share with them; and as Mrs. Wilson's health had become nearly re-established, she and Jessie frequently accompanied the doctor to such entertainments.

More than once, a day had been set for Jessie and her aunt to dine with the Forneys, but when the time came Mrs. Wilson had been indisposed, or the weather had prevented. But now they had promised to take dinner with the doctor on his birthday, for his sister had always celebrated these anniversaries by inviting some of his friends to eat a birthday cake with him.

On this occasion weather and health proved propitious, and Jessie and her aunt had the pleas-

ure of seeing the doctor in his own home. The former, at least, had now to learn that she had never seen this man at his best, for the slightly conventional manner to which she had become used, was laid aside, and in the change which this produced Jessie had the doctor's acquaintance to make over again.

And never had she so much enjoyed the wit and sparkle of the doctor's conversation, which was a combination of the highest culture and the most genuine kind-heartedness. Seeing him now in his own home, she no longer wondered that his sister was fond and proud of him.

The dinner set before the doctor's guests was an exquisite one, — perfect in its minutest details, — such a meal as only a thorough knowledge and love of the art of cookery can insure.

"This salad is certainly the best I ever tasted. You must have a treasure in your cook, Doctor," Mrs. Wilson said, after being helped for the second time to a dish which, in her experience, was seldom a success.

"Yes ; my cook is a treasure, Mrs. Wilson, such an one as cannot be hired every day, even on Beacon street," returned the doctor, with a twinkle in

his eye. "Harriet does make a very good salad," he added, doing justice to the one before him.

"My brother is so fond of all kinds of salads, I suppose I do keep my hand in on that account," Miss Forney said, as if her success was due rather to her brother's fondness for the dish, than her own skill.

After dinner, while her aunt was talking with Miss Forney, over some rare old china, in which occupation they seemed likely to spend the afternoon, Jessie went with the doctor to his library, or study, where the glowing grate and aroma of Russia leather appealed at once to her æsthetic taste.

"Oh! what a delightful room," she exclaimed, taking in its rich and luxurious appointments, from the soft Turkey carpet to the well-filled cases of books which nearly covered three sides of the room. From two large bay windows the light entered through flowering vines; in one of these stood a desk with a shaded lamp, in the other a table of exquisite workmanship draped with a daintily embroidered cloth, upon which were scattered articles of *vertu*.

"I thought the study of a literary man was a sort of den in which he shut himself away from

the refinements of life, never so much as allowing a broom or duster to cross the threshold," said Jessie gayly. "Ah! here is another innovation. The thimble is used here as well as the pen," she added, holding one aloft on her index finger.

"We literary men are not quite anchorites, Miss Jessie; I for one must plead guilty to a weakness for the amenities of life. Yes; that is Harriet's thimble, as well as everything else in that window, for she always sits here with me when not engaged with household duties. You remember," the doctor added, smiling, "that even in Paradise Adam could not live alone."

"And I suppose Miss Forney trained these vines; how lovely they are. With all these fine plants they make your windows just a little wilderness of bloom."

"Yes; every fall Harriet brings the garden indoors, and, like the patient man that I am, I give it house-room here all winter," said the doctor, with an amusing assumption of martyrdom.

"Yes; and very glad you are to have it here, too, I suspect," was Jessie's smiling rejoinder.

A moment later the doctor had wheeled a large easy chair before the big centre table, and begging

Jessie to be seated in it, proposed to show her some fine views which he had collected while abroad.

"Many of these are of places I visited with your father," he said, while adjusting the glass to her eye, after having taken from a cabinet a pile of engravings which filled both arms.

In looking at this collection the time passed so quickly that Jessie could hardly believe two hours had elapsed.

And now Miss Forney entered, and claimed the fulfillment of a promise which Jessie had made at dinner, to sing for her.

"Stephen, you have kept Miss Jessie here nearly two hours all to yourself, and you cannot monopolize her any longer," said his sister, who a moment later led their young guest off to the parlor, bidding her brother to follow, however, as she would not be selfish.

"A pleasure would be no pleasure to my sister if she could not share it," said the doctor, promising to avail himself of her invitation as soon as he should have taken care of the views which were evidently very precious to him.

Long after his guests had gone home that night

the rippling silver notes that had so lately echoed through the house, were still in the doctor's ears ; and he had only to shut his eyes to see the graceful form and sweet face which had lighted his home for a few short hours : a vision of sweetness and grace whose impalpable presence he even yet felt.

Miss Forney had come to her brother's study as usual after their guests were gone, and seeing that he seemed to be absorbed in thought, she had not disturbed him ; but, taking up a bit of work, had given her attention to it. That her brother was indulging his fancy for seeing pictures in the fire she well knew, as he was sitting unoccupied in his easy chair before the glowing grate of coals. It was her habit to wait upon her brother's moods, and since he seemed indisposed for conversation, she was content to remain silent.

The evening was broken, and he had found himself unable to settle to his work as usual, for coming constantly before his mental vision was the picture of a slight girlish figure in a pale blue silk, with soft white lace forming a corsage through which the contour of a faultless neck was visible. A complexion dazzlingly fair as the sun upon snow,

and a mass of rippling light brown hair, which only made more resplendent the soft changeful orbs which were the great charm of this face.

This was the picture upon which the doctor had been gazing, but, looking up, his glance fell upon his sister's figure, robed in the simple black silk which was her customary dress.

"Harriet, why do you always wear black? Have you no light dresses?" he suddenly asked.

"Why, yes; but I think black is more becoming my age. Why, don't you like me in black? You never said anything about it before, and I have worn it constantly since mother's death," was Miss Forney's response, startled out of her usual placidity by the strangeness of her brother's mood.

"Mrs. Wilson is older than you, and a widow beside, but she does not seem to think it necessary to confine herself to so sombre a color," was the evasive reply.

"I am sorry if you have become tired of seeing me in black, Stephen, for I have thought I could never wear anything else," Miss Forney said, laying down her work as she spoke. Seeing that she was taking the matter quite seriously, the doctor hastened to add:

“Oh ! wear whatever you like, sister. You certainly are free to please yourself in the matter, and must not mind my crotchets. I think I have a weakness for bright colors ; perhaps it is common to my sex, but that is no reason you should make a guy of yourself to please me. After all,” he rejoined, smiling, “I am not sure that I should like you to be a walking rainbow ; for though rainbows are well enough in their place, they might not be improved by a background of green carpets and red silk terry.”

Miss Forney resumed her work. Evidently the little lady was satisfied that a change in her dress was not a matter of vital importance to her brother's happiness, for he had returned again to his pictures in the fire.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOCTOR'S AVOWAL.

AUNTY, this is the last lesson of my quarter, and I shall tell the professor to-day that I will not continue them. I propose next week to favor my friends in Newbury with my presence. Aunt Kitty wrote me yesterday that they should not spare me any longer, and if she did not speedily hear I was coming home, she and uncle would come and fetch me." As Jessie spoke she was drawing on her gloves, and the next moment, with a gay *Au revoir!* she had quitted the room for her lesson.

But on her way down-stairs she became aware that some one had just entered the reception-room, and the next moment a servant had placed in her hand Doctor Forney's card.

"I will take off my things, or he will feel his call an intrusion," was her thought, which she acted upon before going in to receive her visitor.

"I am fortunate, Miss Jessie, to find you still in

town ; I feared you might not be," said the doctor, evidently not a little pleased that his fear was not verified.

"I was just telling aunty that I must go to Newbury next week if I would not have a writ of *habeas corpus* served on me," was Jessie's smiling response. Then she inquired for Miss Forney, whom she declared her intention of calling upon before leaving the city.

"Harriet would certainly be very disappointed if you did not," the doctor said, somewhat absently, and then for some reason speech seemed to fail him, since he attempted once or twice to say something, but stopped as if unable to express himself.

For the first time in her acquaintance with the doctor Jessie found herself in the position of entertainer ; for the man who was never at a loss for subject matter of conversation, now apparently had nothing to say.

The situation was becoming the least bit awkward, when Jessie suddenly remembered that the doctor had inquired for her aunt when he first came in.

"I will speak to aunty," she said, rising to touch

the bell, but before she could do so the doctor made a gesture to detain her.

"I shall be happy to see Mrs. Wilson presently," he said, "but first I would like a few words with yourself." Then, as if the sound of his own voice had proved the incentive he needed, he went on: "Miss Jessie, I came here to-night to make a confession, and to ask you a question; not one of ethics social or moral, but the old one about which all the poetry and romance of the ages has centred: for I came to tell you that I love you, and to ask you to be my wife. I know I am an awkward suitor, but let me prove to you that I can be a devoted lover."

In saying this last the doctor had come over to her, and taken the hand which she yielded passively to his clasp; but in the flushed and troubled face he read what boded no success to his suit.

"Do not answer me yet, please," he said earnestly; "I see I have taken you by surprise. I know it is a great deal that I ask, and had I loved you less it might seem like presumption to expect you would give yourself to me. I trusted that love had made me worthy, since it has made me

bold." The tone was so gentle, and even supplicating, that Jessie found herself contrasting it with the doctor's usual confident one.

She found it impossible now to speak the words of protest which had instantly sprung to her lips ; but, oh ! why did he not see that what he asked could never be ?

As she did not reply the doctor went on to tell her how his love for her had grown, even against his better judgment, which had told him that it was folly for him to think of her in this way. He told of the struggle he had had with himself before he succumbed to a passion which had carried captive every imagination of his heart.

When he had finished speaking tears stood in Jessie's eyes, and as soon as she could speak she said, with touching earnestness : " I hope you will believe me when I tell you that I did not dream you felt towards me in this way. Have I ever given ? " — She could not finish this sentence, but the doctor understood what she would have said.

" No ; I acquit you of ever giving me any encouragement, but still I hoped that you might not find it impossible to look upon me as your husband."

Jessie was conscious of a slight tremor that passed over her nerves as he spoke, and possibly this involuntary shrinking to which they had responded had been perceptible to the doctor, for he immediately relinquished her hand.

"Then I have hoped in vain? You cannot think of me in such a relation?" The tone was so sad that Jessie found herself strongly moved by it.

The doctor knew that his suit was virtually rejected, but he must have confirmation of it from her lips.

"I have always looked upon you as so much superior to myself, that it did not occur to me such a relation could exist between us. I thought all your kindness was shown to my father's daughter. You were papa's friend, and so you were mine."

"I see, child, you have not found any response in your heart to my love. The fact of your father's friendship for me has made you tolerant of the claim I have made upon your kindness. I should not have expected your youth would mate with my years. I suppose I have seemed like an old man to you."

"I never thought of you in that way; but always as my kindest and most trusted friend." Jessie's earnestness had given emphasis to her words, and, seemingly, the doctor found in them a ray of hope, for he said quickly:

"Are you quite sure that you could not go a step further in your regard for me? Is it impossible your friendship should ripen into love? If you will give me this hope I will wait years for you, though I have none to lose."

To the doctor's gentle persuasiveness a weaker woman might have yielded. For a moment Jessie found herself held by the subtle magnetism of this man's will. To temporize and thus retain the friendship she had found so pleasant, was a temptation, as was also the desire not to wound his feelings. But even while he had been speaking she realized that her heart did not respond in the least measure to him who sought the closest and tenderest of ties with her. If he were to pass entirely out of her life the sun would still shine, the flowers bloom, and the world seem fair and sweet. For a time she would miss him, perhaps, and there would always be a feeling of regret that anything should have come between their friendship; but

this would be all, for conscience acquitted her of doing aught to win the love she must now reject. For she must be true to herself, though forced to say what she would gladly have avoided.

“Something tells me that I should never be able to feel to you as a wife ought, and I could not vow at God’s altar to love, honor and hold to till death, any one to whom my heart did not spontaneously go out. I am not worthy of what you offer me,” she continued earnestly, “else I should not have been so blind. I should have had some premonition of your feeling toward me. I should have found myself able to return a love which any woman might be proud to have inspired.”

“Do not depreciate yourself, child, nor take any blame for my mistake. The fault is entirely my own ; but I hope it has not forfeited me your confidence and esteem. Since I must be content with your friendship, do not scant the measure ; and if at any time I can serve you, remember that I shall be glad to prove to you that I cherish only gratitude for your patience and candor to-day.”

The doctor was gone, and Jessie still sat where he had left her.

“How kind he is, and how worthy of a good

woman's love ; but how strange that he should have thought of me in this way. If he had proposed to aunty, I think it would not have surprised me more."

It occurred to Jessie now that unless she wished to give her aunt a full account of her interview with the doctor, it would be better that that lady should not know of his call. A few moments later, music-roll in hand, she had quitted the house ; but now her lesson would depend entirely upon the mood in which she found the professor, since it was considerably past her usual hour.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS NORBERRY'S STRATAGEM.

LIKE most river towns, Newbury had its annual picnic in which old and young joined. To go down the river was to the former a day spent in the open air with friends and neighbors, plenty of good cheer, returning at night more tired than if the time had been passed at the wash-tub. But to the young people it meant feasting, flirting, fun and frolic—a riotous good time, and no restrictions.

The notice of such a picnic had been duly given from the pulpit, and the festival appointed for the following Thursday. In the three intervening days food enough was cooked up in the town to provision a regiment. Lunch-baskets, pails and boxes were put in readiness, and everything made ready for the general good time which came but once a year.

On the morning of the picnic the minister was called to Newbury Hill. Aunt Judith Lucas, as

she was familiarly called in the town, had been taken seriously ill in the night, and in one of the intervals of agonizing pain, had asked to see her pastor. So at daylight the minister was sent for, and his wife accompanied him to Aunt Judith's bedside. Mrs. Norberry's plans for the day had been quite different, but she could not go away on this pleasure party and leave her old friend in her last extremity.

The summons to Newbury Hill had reached the parsonage before any of the family were up; and a little later the minister's niece was roused from her morning nap by a rap on her door. Supposing she had overslept, and that a servant had been sent to call her, Jessie answered, "Yes, Mary, I will get right up;" but she sprang instantly from her bed, with a premonition of ill, when her aunt Kitty responded, — "It is I, Jessie; and I want to see you." A moment later the girl was listening to the sad news from Newbury Hill: Aunt Judith Lucas was not expected to live through the day. "You see, dear, I must go to Aunt Judith. But the boys will be very much disappointed. They have talked of nothing but the picnic for the last fortnight. I wish now it had been postponed till

next week, as your uncle suggested," Mrs. Norberry added, trying to reconcile her desire to be with her old friend, and the natural wish not to deprive her children of a pleasure.

"Yes; the day will be spoiled for them without you," returned Jessie, for the moment losing sight of the greater anxiety, in the lesser one of her cousins' disappointment. "But of course you must go. Poor, dear Aunt Judith! I wish I could do something for her myself," she added, with husky voice, remembering how soon this kind friend might be beyond any earthly service.

"Aunt Judith has for years expected a sudden call home, and there is no doubt but she is ready. The sorrow and loss is ours, who will have to part with her," was Mrs. Norberry's rejoinder. "I hope the boys will not give you any trouble, dear, for I shall have to put them in your care," Mrs. Norberry continued, and leaving a few charges for her children, who were not yet awake, she joined her husband in his errand of love to the dying.

Allan and Roger were inconsolable on learning their mother was not to go with them that day, and for a time they refused to be reconciled to the disappointment.

If mamma wasn't going there wouldn't be any fun, and they didn't care anything about it. They would stay at home.

But as Jessie continued to make arrangements for the day, notwithstanding this decision, they apparently thought better of it, and after a time condescended to help in packing the lunch-basket with the goodies their mother had laid out.

When Jessie left the house with her charges an hour later they were in high good humor, and swelling with importance over having the large lunch-basket entrusted to their care. On reaching the pier and seeing the gayly-decorated barge which was to take them down river, their cousin found it hard to restrain their impatience to go at once on board. But this they could not do, as the barge was not yet drawn up alongside the wharf, and the tug which was to take it in tow was still snorting and blowing in the process of getting up steam for its work.

The party were off at last amid much cheering of the youthful voyagers, and adieus to friends on the pier who were to be left behind.

Among the latter was Miss Norberry, who had declined joining the picnic party, but who at the

last moment had taken a fancy to see them off. A few minutes after Jessie left the house with the children, her Aunt Helen had started on her morning walk, taking the pier on her way.

She wished to satisfy herself whether or no Milton Carrol was of the party, and it was with no little satisfaction that she learned of his absence from town; Jessie would be safe from him for at least that day. She wondered if her niece had known that he would not go on this picnic, and whether she would have cared to go herself had she known it.

Since she had no means of satisfying these queries, Miss Norberry was fain to find her solace in the fact that they would not be together on this occasion.

She often lamented her niece's vulgar taste in the choice of friends. How Jessie could like such common sort of people as she seemed to, was a mystery to her. Nothing would have induced her to spend a day in this way with her brother's parishioners; for she did not find Newbury society congenial, and with one or two exceptions, she had no intimate friends in the town.

Squire Lynde's wife who came of a family that

stood high in the State, she had found worthy of her friendship; nor did she ignore Aunt Judith Lucas' claims to her consideration, since the former's father had been a well-known divine.

At these two houses Miss Norberry often visited, and not infrequently met at both places the wives and daughters of the neighboring farmers; but as she had in an eminent degree the faculty of holding at arms' length any one whose acquaintance she did not desire, the result of these meetings was not a better understanding of the people who for her brother's sake would gladly have been friends with her. They were doubtless very good and worthy, she was wont to say: but she had nothing in common with them, as her life, tastes and habit of thought were entirely different; so it was useless for her to seek to assimilate with them. When her niece was at the parsonage Miss Norberry spent most of her time there; but she had never liked the old town, and had her means been sufficient to have kept up an establishment of her own after her mother's death, she would not have consented to live with her brother. She was now looking forward to the time when Jessie would be of age, as she would then come into her

mother's property, when she determined to return to the city, counting upon her unbounded influence over her niece to order her future as she pleased.

But of late a danger had menaced her cherished scheme. If, after all, Jessie were to marry and settle in Newbury, what would become of her well-laid plans? She would have had no fears of such a vexatious ending of her hopes but for Milton Carrol; for there was no one else in the town who would think of aspiring to her niece's hand. Of him, however, she did feel afraid, and more particularly that she could not learn just how matters stood between Jessie and him. She hoped her niece would marry Doctor Forney, who would be able to give her the social position to which her birth entitled her; and for this marriage Miss Norberry had long planned and schemed. By it she would herself attain the acme of her hopes. Her last days would be spent in or near the city of her choice.

Though she was annoyed that the engagement was so long delayed, she believed that it would yet come about if Jessie was not in the meantime thrown in Milton Carrol's way. She was aware

of having blundered the year before in sending the girl away from her ; for in so doing she had brought about just what she wished to avoid, since a more intimate acquaintance, if nothing else, was the result of those weeks spent together at the mountains. Jessie had very little to say about that time, but her aunt did not doubt that here was to be found the reason of her delayed engagement with the doctor.

But though she had not been able to learn the state of Jessie's feelings in regard to Milton Carrol, circumstances had made her more fortunate in his case. Meeting him one day on the street, she had stopped and inquired for his father's health, and been otherwise so gracious, that in the hunger of his heart, Milton Carrol had asked if Jessie were well, and if she were not soon coming home.

Miss Norberry had replied that her niece was in very good health, but that her return was quite uncertain ; and then her evil genius prompted her to add what she regretted as soon as uttered — that Doctor Forney would probably have something to say about Jessie's coming home, as it was in deference to his wishes she had remained in the city so long.

"Is Miss Jessie engaged to Doctor Forney?"

Miss Norberry was not prepared for this direct question, but she rallied herself and answered, "It looks very much like it, does it not?"

"I do not know. It has not been my privilege to hear from Miss Jessie of late," returned Mr. Carrol, who added: "Have you any reason for thinking she is engaged to him? Is she likely to make such a marriage?"

Miss Norberry felt herself arraigned by this question, but she responded, "In all human probability she will; but still one never knows just what a woman means in such a matter by what she says." Miss Norberry had laughed as this last admission slipped from her tongue.

"I believe you. But I do not believe Miss Jessie will marry the doctor." The defiant tone in which Mr. Carrol had said this angered the woman who had thought to be herself inquisitor.

"Perhaps, Mr. Carrol, you have had hopes in that direction yourself," was her retort.

"If I ever had such a hope, it would have long since died of inanition, since I have had nothing to feed it," Milton Carrol had said bitterly.

If Miss Norberry's nature had been less hard

and selfish she would have been satisfied with the stab she had already given ; but having determined that this man should never marry her niece, and fearing he would yet interfere to prevent her marriage with the doctor, she had resolved to show him that any aspirations on his own part to Jessie's hand were futile. The opportunity was too good to be lost, and she hastened to follow her first blow with one that struck deeper.

"You do well, Mr. Carrol, not to feed any such hope," she said, with no small degree of hauteur. "Jessie Norberry has too much respect for her old family name ever to ally it with a dishonored one ; to say nothing of the physical disability to marriage which you inherit as your father's son."

Had it been a man who had thus assailed him Milton Carrol would have laid his antagonist in the dust ; but as it was a woman, with a gesture of proud disdain he raised his hat and bade her good day.

Never in her life had Miss Norberry felt so discomforted ; she had gained her purpose, but at the loss of no little self-respect, since she knew that only her sex had saved her from the wrath of this man whose forbearance had been the very quintessence of high breeding.

CHAPTER XV.

DOWN RIVER.

THE day was warm enough to make the shadow of the grove delightful, and Jessie had found no trouble in keeping her cousins away from the water. After serving them their dinner in true picnic fashion, she had led them off on a wild, joyous ramble through the woods, where her own enthusiasm and love of adventure fired their ardent young spirits, and made them her ready followers. They were returning to the grove laden with wood spoils, when they met a party of boys, who in cruising about the neighboring shore had found a quantity of fragrant river pinks. Nothing in the bouquet of wild flowers which Allan was carrying would at all compare with them; and he was at once seized with the desire to possess some of these rare and beautiful flowers.

"I will go and get some for myself. You keep them," he said, when a few were offered him; and Jessie met an eager, animated face raised to her

own, and knew she was expected to endorse this proposition.

"No, Allan, you cannot go," she said quietly, hoping he would accept her decision as final, and take the proffered flowers, which he evidently coveted.

"Why not? It won't take more than ten minutes just to row over there. John Hines says he'll go with me. Say, can't I?" and with boyish persistence Allan rung the changes upon this till Jessie was obliged to be very decided in her refusal.

"You know, Allan, your mother expressly said you were not to get into a boat. So you need not say anything more about it."

"Mamma meant alone, I know she did. 'Course she would let me go with a big feller like John Hines," was Allan's angry protest against the injustice of his cousin's refusal.

He might be right; quite possibly his mother would have let him go if she were here, but Jessie felt that she could not in the face of her prohibition.

"I promised your mother that you should not get into a boat, Allan, and she trusted you to me. It is not like me to do what I say I will not. Is it?"

John Hines here signified his willingness to go and get some of these pinks for Allan, since it was only a short distance, he said, and would take him but a few minutes. Allan was a sort of autocrat among the boys of the town, and there were few of them but would have been willing to serve him.

"No; if I am such a baby that I can't go for them myself, I won't have them," Allan said angrily. "Girls are always so 'fraid," he added contemptuously. "You might let me, Jess. I know mamma would if she were here." Seeing that this appeal was useless, Allan angrily threw away the flowers which a few moments before he had so treasured.

"We will walk along by the shore, and possibly we may find some," was Jessie's proposition, but Allan was not to be so easily won from his fit of sullenness; for he allowed her and Roger to start on this quest before a better spirit came to him.

But presently, glancing back, she saw he was following, and when he finally came up with them she was in the middle of a story she had been telling Roger. Punishment as it was to him to lose one of his cousin's stories, he assumed an in-

difference which might have deceived one who did not know him ; but Jessie saw at once that it but added to his previous ill-nature.

Jessie's search for pinks was not rewarded, though they followed the shore for quite a little distance ; perhaps for the reason that this spot was too much the resort of pleasure parties to make treasure-finding likely. But Allan for a few moments almost lost sight of his resentment in his satisfaction at proving his cousin mistaken.

"'Course there ain't any here. I knew there wasn't all the time," he said, still hugging his grievance.

Satisfied that they were not to be found, Jessie proposed returning to the grove, whither every one but themselves seemed to have gone. Here they found the company amusing themselves watching the efforts of some of their number to knock down a pole which was set loosely in the ground.

This they hoped to accomplish by throwing stones at it, but there were a dozen shots which missed to one that affected in the least the equilibrium of the pole ; and no one had yet succeeded in sending it down. The game finally became

quite general as the lookers-on were seized with a desire to accomplish where others failed, for the pole seemed to defy all missiles aimed at it. This was the state of things when Jessie reached the grove with her cousins. And a few moments later Allan had made himself the hero of the hour by a lucky shot, which so swayed the pole from its position that an instant afterwards it was flat upon the ground.

"Good! Well done!" echoed on every side, and the meed of praise was not less hearty that it was the minister's boy who had proved the successful competitor.

This episode seemed to entirely restore Allan's good nature; but apparently he had wearied of restraint, for he at once asserted his independence by joining a group of big boys, who hailed the candidate of recent honors with vociferous cheers, and made a place for him at once. The game of "fox and geese" was now proposed, and presently a goodly number were engaged in this amusing play.

Jessie felt that it would be just as well to leave Allan to himself awhile, knowing that after a time he would seek her side, and be as sweet and winning as she could wish. She saw that he was soon

entirely absorbed in the game which was new to him, and had evidently forgotten her entirely. Then it occurred to her that she might herself go and get some of the pinks which he had desired, and she determined to do so.

She had never happened to come upon these river beauties, though she had heard wonderful tales of their discovery in out-of-the-way places. Now she would have a chance to see them growing, and it would be such a surprise and pleasure to Allan to really have some of the coveted flowers, after all.

The game in which he was so much interested was likely to last some time longer, and meanwhile she could slip away to the cove and return before he would miss her. If he did discover her absence he would have no suspicion where she had gone, and he was not likely soon to weary of his present companionship. She would have liked to ask John Hines to go with her, as he knew just where the flowers were, but as she could not do this without attracting Allan's attention, she decided to go alone.

Roger, wearied out with his late frolic, had fallen asleep on her lap, and laying the child on a

pile of shawls, she left him in the care of a neighbor, saying she should be gone but a short time ; but telling no one of her purpose.

She found the vicinity of the pier as deserted as when she left it ; evidently the party were all in the grove. The barge was laying off in the stream, so she could see the whole deck, and if there were any life on board it did not make itself visible.

It was the work of a moment to untie the smaller of the two boats lying at the pier, step into it and push off. A few dips of the oar brought her into deep water, and presently she passed the opening into the grove, from whence she caught a glimpse of the players.

Since living in Newbury Jessie had rowed about on the river a good deal, and felt entirely at home in a boat ; but she saw at once that she had miscalculated the distance. The boys had claimed to have found their floral treasures in a cove just round the point, but this proved to be a much wider strip of land than she had supposed. It occasioned her no uneasiness, however, as it would not take more than half an hour at the longest. But it was very warm on the water, and the exercise of rowing, together with the heat, soon fatigued

her to that degree she was obliged to lie still upon her oars for a moment's rest, and in the interval she threw off the sun-hat which seemed to intercept what air there was.

Feeling somewhat relieved by this action, she resumed her oars, and after some ten minutes' good pulling reached the entrance to the cove; and now began a vigilant outlook for the flowers which were said to grow on the banks along here, in the meantime running no small risk of a capsize in keeping such close proximity to the shore.

She had forgotten to ask the boys if they had found this flower immediately at the river's edge; and she had about made up her mind that they must have gone ashore, and that she had come on a fruitless quest, when she espied a short distance away what might be one of these river beauties.

Determined to know if this were the case, she made for the only rock of any size near, drew her boat up beside it, and hastily securing the painter, was a moment later scrambling over some low bushes which intercepted her way.

A subtle fragrance which she well remembered convinced her that her quest was ended, and pres-

ently, nestled among the beach grass, she found a number of these lovely fringed flowers.

She had secured quite a bouquet when she discovered another river flower which she had never before seen growing, the king's finger. The true botanist's love for unfamiliar specimens in the floral kingdom now tempted her to a farther quest, which was rewarded in the finding of one or two more equally rare and beautiful specimens of river flora; then she suddenly remembered that time was fleeting, and she must return.

Thinking of Allan's surprise when she should show him these treasures, she started to regain her boat. But where was it? There was certainly the stone where she had tied it; yes, and there was her little skiff dancing on the crest of a wave some twenty feet or more away.

What was she to do? Farther up the cove was a large scow such as is used to transport hay. Would it be possible to make use of it to regain her boat? This hope she was obliged to abandon, however, as Reason told her she would never be able to manage anything so unwieldy, even if it were sea-worthy, which probably was not the case, or it would not have been left here.

Jessie now for the first time realized the isolation of her surroundings, when, on scanning the horizon, she could discern no living thing. Evidently there was nothing to do but to stay here till her friends came for her ; but now she remembered that she had told no one of her purpose to visit the cove.

But they would miss the boat, and must know she had taken it. In this thought she was obliged to find her only solace, since it was the sole ray of hope she could discover. To walk back would be impossible, since she could not penetrate the dense piece of woods lying between her and the picnic grounds. But fortunately she had come far up the cove, and she might make her way round by the bank to the other side, where she would perhaps be able by some means to signal her friends. In doing this she passed the scow before mentioned, and left it reluctantly, though convinced that it could not aid her in any way other than as a more desirable resting-place than the river-bank, if she were obliged to spend the night here.

With some difficulty she followed the shore till it brought her nearly opposite the head of the point where she had hoped to at least get sight of the barge ; but, unfortunately, the land here was

too low and boggy to allow of her keeping on in that direction, though had she done so she must have walked miles before she could have obtained a clear view round the thickly-wooded point which was between her and the open stream. Thinking this land might be hiding from her sight those who were seeking her, she called repeatedly, but no response came back — a primeval silence seemed to have settled upon nature.

Since her boat was entirely beyond her reach, she saw with satisfaction that it was drifting farther and farther out into the stream, where it was likely to be discovered by her friends, who would at once understand the situation. But it was so tedious waiting with the uncertainty as to what she was waiting for ! If she had not been so quiet about her intentions, the situation would not have been so critical ; for when she did not return, her friends would have known where to seek her ; now their doing so would depend upon accident. The shadows were falling more and more obliquely, but she had not taken her watch with her that morning, and was at a loss about the time ; for to her excited fancy it seemed hours that she had traversed the river bank straining her eyes to catch

sight of anything coming round the point. And now she began to fear she might have to spend the night here; for she was confident that the hour set to leave the picnic grounds had passed. What could have kept her friends from seeking her?

It finally seemed useless to wait longer for the help which did not come. She must find some other way out of the difficulty. The first thing to do was to learn what her chances were in the opposite direction,—if a human habitation were near.

A large tract of land that had lately been burned over lay between her and what seemed to be dense woods. There might be a road, however, she could not at this distance tell; but at all events, she must leave this spot, since no one would come here for her now.

It seemed to Jessie almost like a voluntary desertion of her little cousins to turn her back upon the expanse of water before her, and seek safety for herself in the opposite direction. It was not her own trouble which brought tears to her eyes as she did so, but the thought of them. She knew they would not want for care in her absence, but how had they been comforted in her loss?

When she finally turned and began to make her way over the rough tract of country before her, she found her view of the water quickly shut off, as the land gradually descended, and in places was so low and swampy as to be almost impassable.

By picking her stepping places, and making sudden detours, she was able to proceed, and after a time saw an opening ahead of her which she felt sure was a road through the woods, since she could see in quite a little distance. She determined to follow it, reasoning that it must bring out somewhere, and it was her only alternative. Once entered on this wood road she had to shut her eyes to all the wild beauty about her; for the mosses and lichens which lined her path would at another time have held her in complete thrall; but now she had not a moment to lose, as she did not know how long this road might be, or that darkness might not overtake her ere she reached the open country again.

To her joy, some fifteen minutes later this lay before her: the woods were passed, and off to the right were hay-fields where she was presently sure men were at work. On coming nearer, she saw they were loading a large ox-team with the

fragrant new-made hay with which the air was richly scented.

Jessie now suddenly realized her fatigue. She must sit down for a moment, if only to get strength to tell her story ; for she would be obliged to appeal to these laborers, since she could walk no further, and no house where she could seek shelter was visible.

She resolved first to find out what her chances were of getting home that night. If there were a horse in the neighborhood she would at any price secure it. She had only time to formulate this plan, when, looking up, she saw one of the hay-makers coming toward her ; and then she found herself shrinking from the necessity of asking aid of these men.

In another moment this one would be near enough for her to speak, and she would do so, she resolved ; but when she raised her eyes again an exclamation of astonishment escaped her, for it was no stranger approaching, but the last man in the world she would have thought to see here — it was Milton Carrol.

“Why, Miss Jessie ! what has happened ? You are in trouble ? ” was his hurried salutation.

Surprise nearly deprived Jessie of the power of speech, but involuntarily she extended both hands to him.

"Oh! I am so glad to see you," she cried, with dewy eyes; and then between smiles and tears, she told him what had happened.

"And you have walked all the way from the cove here? A good three miles! and over such a rough road, too. Why, you must be completely tired out." There was in Mr. Carrol's eyes as he spoke a caressing, expressing expression which for the moment made them very kind.

"I was not fortunate enough to find the road till just before I reached the woods," Jessie returned, "but I am not so very tired, — that is, not so tired as I was ten minutes ago," smiling.

In her surprise at meeting him, Jessie forgot to ask how he happened to be here. It seemed the most natural thing in the world that she should have found him in her trouble. But he presently explained that he had been down here two days cutting the hay from a piece of grass land which belonged to him, and that he was intending to go up river that night with a scow-load.

"So you see nothing could have happened more

opportunely. I can take you right home, that is, if you will go up with me on the hay. It will be much less fatiguing than by carriage; though if you prefer it, I can easily send you by team," he added.

Jessie would not hear to such an arrangement. She would much prefer to go with him in the scow, she said frankly.

"Then it must have been your scow I saw in the cove. If it had not been altogether too unwieldy I should have tried to reach my boat by its means." Jessie spoke with her usual sprightliness, though making an effort to do so.

When she declared her preference for going with him on the hay, a light had come into Milton Carrol's eyes which suddenly died out again. In that brief moment he had taken counsel of his thoughts, and springing up from his seat beside her, he said gravely, —

"I am sorry I have no better conveyance to offer you than my ox-team, as I fear your ride to the cove will hardly be a comfortable one; but I will come for you when we are ready to start."

Ever since her return to Newbury Jessie had marked a change in Mr. Carrol's manner to her;

and his grave courtesy now was a fair sample of the attitude he had taken toward her, and which she had found herself unable to understand. Concern for her welfare had in the first instant surprised from him the old hearty friendliness ; and Jessie at once noted the change and felt pained by it.

She was glad to avail herself of the rest which the interval before starting gave her, for she was feeling her fatigue more and more. While waiting now for Mr. Carrol's return, she recalled hearing that he had bought a tract of grass land down river ; though when told that morning that he was away getting his hay, it had not occurred to her that he would be anywhere in the vicinity of the picnic ground.

When Mr. Carrol came for her, some few moments later, he had in his hand one of those broad-brimmed hats which hay-makers often wear to shield their necks from the blistering rays of the sun.

"This is the best I can do for you, Miss Jessie," he said, after having carefully lined the crown with his pocket handkerchief. Twelve months before Milton Carrol would have insisted upon tying it on, but now he did not offer to do so—

the fact was, he felt himself unequal to the ordeal of having those questioning eyes any nearer his face.

Jessie removed the turban which she had improvised from her handkerchief while waiting, and accepted with thanks the head covering Mr. Carrol had brought her.

"Why, this is hat and umbrella all in one," she said gayly, but a moment later finding it impossible to look out from the broad, flapping brim, she pinned this back to keep it out of her eyes, adding with charming piquancy, "You should have brought me a rake, that my outfit might be complete."

"I did not think of that; but if you wish for one you can be supplied. It would add to the picturesqueness of the costume." Milton Carrol would have been other than a man had he not been moved by the sweet arch face which looked out from the hat to which Jessie had contrived to give an air and grace which had not seemed among its possibilities.

"Why, this must be enchanted ground if I have only to wish for a thing to have it. I wonder if it would do any good to wish for a coach-and-four."

There was in Jessie's manner as she spoke an unconscious conciliatory grace which he found hard to resist, and which tempted him to lay aside the sternness of manner to which he had schooled himself. But, loving her as he did, he felt that she must be all to him or nothing, and since Fate had decreed it should be the latter, he had decided that the sooner they returned to polite conventionality in their intercourse, the better it would be for himself, at least.

The three men whom he had hired to help him get this hay, and boat it up river, were already on the fore part of the load when he helped Jessie to a seat which had been prepared for her in the rear.

"Did you ever ride on a load of hay before?" he asked, springing to a seat beside her when all was ready for their start.

"O, yes! at Newbury Hill I used often to ride on the hay. That was one of the things I always counted on doing when I went there," Jessie said, and then was silent, for she had remembered the sad message which had that morning come from the farm where she had spent so many happy days.

Mr. Carrol had not heard of Aunt Judith's ill-

ness, and Jessie now told him. While they were talking of the good woman whose death would be a great loss to the town, since everybody loved her, the driver was putting his oxen along as fast as was possible over a road that was at best but a cart-path.

Conversation under such circumstances had its disadvantages; and Jessie and her companion soon lapsed into a silence which was unbroken for the remainder of the way to the cove. On reaching the scow the hay was quickly transferred to it, and one of the men started back with the cart, while the other two remained to boat the hay up river.

"You are not taking a full load," Jessie said, as they pushed off, "at least not of hay," she added with a troubled look.

"No, not quite; but my passenger is most welcome for all that," Mr. Carrol returned, his features relaxing into a smile. But meeting the wistful expression of a pair of brown eyes, he added, with kindly earnestness, — "The hay can come up river any time. Do not give yourself a moment's uneasiness about that. I only hope you will not find the sail too wearisome; but you will be more com-

fortable to lie down. I have had many a good nap going up river on my hay."

"Thank you! I shall get along very well as I am. I could not sleep if I were to lie down," was Jessie's reply; but she had no sooner spoken than she was conscious of her cramped and aching limbs.

"I am afraid we shall not get along very fast, for the wind is dead against us," Mr. Carrol said a few moments after they started, at the same time anxiously scanning the horizon.

Jessie made no response, for she had not heard this remark. She was asking herself now whether it would not have been better for her to have taken other means of reaching home, rather than to have put Mr. Carrol to the trouble of going up with half a load, as he was doing on her account. This would have given her less concern had she felt sure that he regarded her with his former kindness; but his coldness and reserve of late troubled her, and to-day it had been more marked than on any previous occasion.

As they passed the deserted picnic ground Jessie had a realizing sense of the anxiety and trouble which her disappearance must have cost her

friends. Probably they had gone home believing her drowned, as they must have found her boat out in the river. She imagined the distress which this would cause Allan, who would remember his fit of naughtiness that afternoon, and be heart-broken. She was not conscious of the sigh which escaped her at this point, but Milton Carrol noted it, and also the pained expression of her face, and he would have given much to have known just what was troubling her. It could hardly be that she was still worrying about having been separated from her party, since no harm had come of it. Had what he said about the wind being against them made her fear that they would not be home before morning? Was it the hope of reaching Newbury under the cover of darkness which had made her catch so eagerly at this mode of conveyance? He remembered on a former occasion how sensitive she had been to having any publicity given to a misadventure. Was it the same feeling which had prompted her to go home in this way? Did she see now that she had made a mistake in electing to go in his company, since it was likely to be known in the town that he had brought her home?

Mr. Carrol's resolve was instantly taken. He would reach Newbury before daylight. If he found it impossible to do so by water he would land at Barstead, ten miles above, where was kept a famous trotter. With that horse he knew he could get her to her uncle's house before any one in the town would be stirring. By so doing nobody need know, unless she herself chose to speak of it, that she had come in his company. He would at any rate save her from the odium of having her name associated with his own; for that others regarded him in the same light that Miss Norberry did, he no longer had any doubt.

The fact of his mad blood and dishonored name which she had flung in his face, had come, in his own estimation, to be an insuperable barrier to his marriage with this girl. There had been a fierce conflict in his heart between love and pride, but it had ended in a vow not to interfere with Jessie Norberry's future. Whatever it might know of disappointment or sorrow, or unrealized possibilities, he would be in no way responsible.

Rousing from her painful reverie, Jessie perceived that Mr. Carrol was exerting all his strength at one of the oars.

“Why do you do that?” she asked, laying her hand upon his arm to deter him from what she felt was a waste of strength.

He looked up and smiled. “We have a long distance to go yet,” he replied, without relaxing his efforts at the oar.

Jessie said no more, but sank again into another reverie. Meanwhile Nature’s grand panorama of dark green foliage outlined against the evening sky, wherein was blended the softest azure tints, with the gold and purple of a brilliant sunset, was entirely disregarded by her.

After a time she was conscious enough of her surroundings to be aware that a whispered conference was taking place between Mr. Carrol and his two assistants, and presently that they were going through the water at greater speed. But she did not associate cause and effect in this case; nor did it occur to her that something had given renewed strength to those brawny arms which no longer plied their oars with the slow, mechanical motion that had previously marked their rowing.

The picturesque river-banks winding in and out in their myriad curves and projections, here a wooded dell whose graceful slope met the river’s

flow, there a patch of meadow land, resplendent in tints borrowed from the evening sky, and anon a stretch of rocky shore, wild and beautiful in its varied verdure, these would at another time have appealed deeply to her sense of the artistic, but were now unnoticed by the girl, who, wrapped in troubled thought, was unconscious of the picture which Nature spread out before her.

As night settled down, sheer weariness compelled Jessie to resort to the couch which Mr. Carrol prepared for her, by spreading a piece of sail-cloth over the hay. Here, covered with the blanket which he had brought for his own use, she could rest her weary limbs, a privilege of which she was glad to avail herself. Sleep, however, was out of the question in her present disturbed state of mind, and she found herself going over and over again her trying experience of the day. Some one to whom she could have talked, or who would have talked to her, would have seemed to her a godsend — anything which would have put an end to this weary thinking; but Mr. Carrol had wrapped himself, as it were, in a mantle of silence, and she found herself lacking the courage to disturb him.

After a time she had fallen to watching the grave, stern face which did not relax a muscle. What had produced such a transformation in the man who only a twelvemonth before had been one of the most entertaining and pleasant of companions? Was it anxiety about his father that had changed the genial, kindly nature into the reserved, morose one? Though Jessie knew that his father's condition was precarious, she felt that this did not furnish an explanation.

It was as if something had come between them, something which had made him distrust or disapprove of her; though she knew of nothing that was likely to do so; for she little suspected her Aunt Helen of having interfered between them. Though he had been kind and solicitous for her comfort, she felt this was not done with the old heartiness. What could have wrought this change in him? She would have liked to ask him, for that there was some reason for this difference in his manner to her, she felt sure. But since she could not do this, it only disturbed her the more to dwell upon it. Possibly she had been mistaken, she told herself; he might have some trouble of which she was not cognizant. But if he were the

man she had taken him to be, no ordinary trial would have made him thus hard ; and Jessie did not believe she had been deceived in him. She would be patient and wait. What she did not understand now, would sometime be explained. But meanwhile she would have been glad to make some inquiries about his father, whom she had not seen since her return to Newbury.

The stern face, forbidding, almost, in its present aspect, did not, however, invite her confidence ; and the opportunity for an explanation which might have brought these two hearts together, passed, and left them to further misunderstandings and estrangement.

CHAPTER XVI.

MISS NORBERRY'S REPENTANCE.

THE afternoon had nearly waned before Jessie was missed ; but even then her absence did not occasion alarm, for her friends supposed she had gone into the woods, as she was known to be a dear lover of nature, and to delight in her solitudes.

But when the hour set for leaving the grove came, and she did not return, some concern was felt, and parties at once started out in different directions to look for her.

Then the boat was missed, and presently discovered out in the stream. No one had seen Jessie take it ; but the boys who had used it early in the afternoon were confident that they had left it secure.

When those who had been looking for her in the woods returned, the opinion began to gain ground that she must have gone out in the boat ; a few minutes later this was captured, and the

missing girl's hat found in it. This seemed to be positive proof of her late presence, but where was she now ?

She would naturally be somewhere near the shore, it was thought, if the boat had got away from her in landing ; but when no response came to the loud and repeated calls of her friends, this hope was abandoned.

At first no one thought of the cove, as it was not supposed the boat had floated so far ; but finally this spot was explored, though too late to find any trace of her there ; and now it was feared that something serious had befallen her.

It was with sad hearts that the party finally turned homeward after a thorough exploration of the whole neighborhood. But still they were not entirely without hope that their missing companion had in some fortuitous way escaped the fate they feared for her. These dark forebodings were kept from Allan and Roger, who supposed their cousin had gone home some other way, since she could not be found ; and their friends encouraged this belief, thinking it kinder to do so, than to share their fears with them.

But when the children reached home, and learned

that Jessie was not there, and that no one knew where she was, and that it was even feared she had been drowned, their cries, coupled with Miss Norberry's angry denunciations of those who had suffered her niece to meet such a fate, for a time turned the parsonage into a semblance of pandemonium.

No one who saw Helen Norberry when this news was brought her, would ever forget her grief and rage.

How dared they come to her with such a story ! Why had they come away at all and left her niece's fate uncertain ? "No one but poltroons and cowards would have so deserted a comrade," were among her angry utterances.

Those who would have sympathized with her, found their attempts scorned, and were made to feel that their presence in the house was unwelcome. For, after giving vent to a tirade of injustice in which all the party were included, she shut herself into her brother's study to bear alone the blow under which her reason almost staggered.

If Milton Carrol had been at home she would have sent for him. She remembered with remorse how glad she had been only that morning to find

he was not in the party. Ah! if he only had been, this would not have happened. The cruel waters could not have taken her from him; for if he had found it impossible to save her, he too would have gone down. Miss Norberry fully believed this, so entirely did she believe in Milton Carrol's love for her niece.

"Jessie drowned, — dead! oh! it cannot be," she moaned, as with a nervous shudder she covered her face to shut out the terrible picture which thought presented of that fair young form floating among the reeds of the river.

Milton Carrol would have been amply avenged had he known how, in her trouble, Miss Norberry's thoughts turned to him for help, and how, during all the terrible hours of that night-vigil, she lamented the pride and hardness of heart with which she had striven to shape her niece's future.

The minister and his wife were summoned from Aunt Judith's bedside, and reached home just after midnight, having left their poor friend still living, but unconscious of the going and coming of those about her.

Though overwhelmed at first by the news which had been brought them, they did not upon reach-

ing home, and learning the full particulars, feel like taking quite so despondent a view of Jessie's fate as had her companions. To them it appeared impossible that she could have been drowned in smooth water at midday, and within sight and hearing of her friends. For the fact that her boat had been found near the picnic grounds, presupposed her not to have gone far; though the mystery of her non-appearance anywhere on the shore was inexplicable. It seemed more probable that she had gone ashore and been overcome by the heat, perhaps fainted, and not returned to consciousness in time to make her whereabouts known to her friends. Or she might have fallen and been injured, sprained her ankle, or in some other way been disabled. That some of the party had not been left to continue the search through the night, seemed to the minister and his wife a great oversight.

On reaching home Mr. Norberry began making arrangements for a more thorough search, and in a short time found a dozen or twenty men ready to start with him in the morning; for it was thought best to wait till daylight, as something might be heard from the missing one in the meantime.

Mrs. Norberry had succeeded after a time in quieting her excited children, and inspiring them with her own hope that Jessie would yet be found all right, and they had finally fallen asleep assuring each other that cousin Jess would come home in the morning, for papa would be sure to find her and bring her.

Notwithstanding that the day had been a fatiguing one to many, there was little sleeping done that night in Newbury while Jessie Norberry's fate was still uncertain; and when, just before dawn, a carriage was driven down the main street at a very unusual rate of speed, the sound was followed by more than one anxious watcher, who by some strange sense of prescience knew that it would stop at the minister's door.

Alone with her grief and repentance, Miss Norberry had also heard this carriage, but it bore no significance to her overwrought nerves; and a moment later, when the library door opened, and her niece entered the room, she raised a blanched and grief-stricken face, in which was no recognition of the truth.

Guided by the light in her uncle's study, Jessie had gone directly there on reaching home; and

comprehending at a glance what the night had been to her aunt, in which she had mourned her dead, the girl went over to her, and putting both arms about her neck, nestled into her lap as she had done when a child, sorry for any wrong-doing. Neither spoke for several moments, but Jessie felt herself folded in such an embrace as this relative had not given her for years.

Mrs. Norberry had heard that carriage stop at her door, and as soon as she could release herself from the arms of her sleeping children, she had come to the study, whither the sound of voices attracted her.

"Thank God, my child, that you are not lying helpless and deserted in those lonely woods," she said, folding to her heart the girl who was as dear to her as her own children.

While Jessie was telling her story the door again opened, and her uncle came in; and then more tears were shed, and thanks offered for her safe return.

"I thought to surprise and please the children with a few flowers, and instead I have given you all so much trouble," Jessie said, in concluding her story.

"Let us return thanks to Almighty God," was her uncle's response. A few moments later the first rays of the morning sun shone upon the little group kneeling in the pastor's study, who with hearts full of gratitude for their unbroken circle, remembered her upon whom the day of a brighter world had dawned. For Aunt Judith had breathed her last half an hour after the minister and his wife had left her bedside.

Before going to her room Jessie had stolen to the nursery, where her light kiss upon her cousin Allan's brow had at once aroused him.

"I knew papa would find you and bring you home ; I told Rog so. They said you was drowned, and I cried awful, and so did Rog too. Aunt Helen said we might. 'Poor children ! they may cry ; their hearts are not stone,' Aunt Helen said. I tell you, she was dreadful mad with them for letting you get drowned. Didn't she give it to them awful cause they left you ? You orter heard her, Jess ; she thinks a heap of you." The boy's soft eyes had filled with tears while speaking, and now, burying his head in his cousin's lap, he sobbed, "We all think a heap of you, and I'm sorry I was so bad yesterday."

"Never mind now, dear ; that's all passed," returned Jessie, raising the tearful face to impress upon it the seal of forgiveness in a loving kiss. By this time Roger had woke, and for the next few minutes Jessie had all that she could do to divide herself between the two.

"Is your foot broke?" the latter presently asked, remembering that some such calamity had been suggested as happening to his cousin.

"No, darling, my foot is all right ; nothing happened to me only that I lost my boat, and so could not come back to go home with you," was Jessie's reply, and then she answered all their questions as to where she went and how she had come home.

"Oh ! I thought papa brought you home," Allan said, not a little disappointed to find that this deed of valor had been performed out of the family. Then, quick to accord justice where it was due, he cried, "Three cheers for Mr. Carrol, the best man in the world next to papa," and while the nursery was echoing to the round of cheers which he had proposed, Jessie escaped to her room.

"You should not have told Allan that Mr. Carrol brought you home last night," Miss Norberry said to her niece a few hours later. "Now it will

be all over town, for that child is perfectly ridiculous in the way he goes on about it. One would think, to hear him talk, that your rescue was a deed of prowess and valor which had covered Mr. Carrol with glory. Allan's head is full of the old tales of chivalry he has been reading lately, and which he has mixed all up with this affair." Before twenty-four hours had elapsed Miss Norberry would have been glad to forget that Jessie owed her rescue to Milton Carrol. No sooner did she know her niece to be alive and safe than her heart hardened to the man who had laid this obligation upon her.

Jessie did not reply, for she knew it would be idle to argue the matter with her aunt. But had her cousin Allan been near at the moment, he would have received the caress which she gave him in her heart as she resolved that his new-found hero should lose nothing of his prestige through her.

CHAPTER XVII.

JESSIE'S DILEMMA.

WHILE you are resting this afternoon, Aunt Helen, I will make some calls; for if we go home to-morrow this will be my last opportunity."

"I should think you would feel the need of rest yourself. You will be all used up by evening, and not fit to see any one." There was a note of annoyance in Miss Norberry's voice, which did not escape her niece.

"No one knows we are in town, so we are not likely to have visitors," was Jessie's reply.

Miss Norberry did not inform her niece that she had written Doctor Forney they would be in Boston a few days for their Christmas shopping, and where he might find them. For some reason, she thought it best to say nothing about this to Jessie. The glance which her niece had given her a moment since made her a little uneasy, and she found herself hoping that the doctor would say nothing

of her letter, but would leave Jessie to suppose he had learned of her presence in the city by accident.

In fact, this expected call from the doctor was the real reason of Miss Norberry's deciding to remain in this afternoon, though she had pleaded fatigue as her motive; so she was quite annoyed on learning Jessie's intention to use the time in making calls.

"If you have set your heart on it, I suppose you must go, but pray remember that I am alone, and do not extend your visits to visitations," was her ungracious rejoinder.

Dropping in to her Aunt Wilson's while out, Jessie found awaiting her there a letter from home. It was from her Aunt Kitty, and written the previous evening.

"Why! Doctor Carrol is dead," Jessie exclaimed, and then read aloud what followed this announcement. "He had another shock last night, and this morning he dropped away without any apparent suffering. His poor wife is completely prostrated by the blow." Here the letter dropped from the girl's nerveless fingers; stooping, she picked it up mechanically, and presently excusing herself to her aunt, left the house.

She had intended making another call, but this was now forgotten, and so absorbed was she in the intelligence just received, that she hardly noticed whither her steps were tending until she had reached the hotel. Here she found her aunt and Doctor Forney deep in the discussion of a popular book.

Jessie had been schooling herself to meet her relative with an announcement which Doctor Carroll's death seemed to make necessary; for she had resolved to immediately carry out the promise she had made him, but she had not been prepared to find a visitor on her return.

That Jessie was disturbed, her aunt saw at once, and she fancied herself suspected of finessing to bring about this visit, proving true the old adage, that a guilty conscience needs no accuser.

"Why, child, what has brought you home with such a long face?" she asked lightly, thinking to give Jessie a hint of her displeasure at this fit of taciturnity.

"I have had bad news from Newbury," Jessie replied, hesitating a moment before adding, "Doctor Carroll is dead."

"Why, you quite startled me. I supposed some-

thing had happened to your uncle," returned her aunt, who added coldly, "Doctor Carrol's death might have been looked for any time within the last twelve months."

Jessie had known this, but nevertheless the announcement in her aunt's letter had found her entirely unprepared. Ever since reading those words, "Doctor Carrol is dead," they had been repeating themselves over and over again in her brain, till their import to herself was fully realized. More than once in the last six months she had asked herself what she would do in the event of his death, and her mental response had been immediate, — "I will go at once to Arlington and find Doctor Landford."

But was it necessary to do this at once? If she did so it would necessitate her putting herself in direct opposition to her aunt, who would certainly not consent to her starting on a journey without knowing her object and destination.

If her Aunt Helen had not been here with her there would have seemed no question as to her duty; for had she not promised the doctor to deliver the letter as soon as she heard of his death? That was, certainly, what she had agreed to do.

Would it be any easier, though, to keep this promise a few days hence? They had planned to go home on the morrow, and Jessie could see no way to evade doing so, but by declaring her purpose.

Her aunt's opposition must be met sometime, and as well now, perhaps, as a week hence. For, at any cost, Jessie was determined to keep her promise to the dead, though something seemed to tell her that the consequences would not be light.

She would wait, however, till their visitor should leave before telling her aunt of the journey she intended taking that night. For a moment she had been tempted to go without her knowledge; but remembering the night of suffering she had once occasioned her, she had not the heart to repeat the experience.

She would tell her that she was going, and where, but that should be all; for explanations would involve what she had no right at present to divulge.

But the doctor seemed in no haste to depart, and Jessie, ill at ease under suspense and anxiety for her half-defined plans, was silent and abstracted. Her aunt finally relinquished all effort to draw her

into the conversation, and only once did she seem to take any interest in it whatever; and that was when the doctor, after commenting upon the useful life just closed, remarked that it was very unfortunate so brilliant an intellect should have been clouded at the last. Then Jessie had interposed.

"Doctor Carrol has been quite himself for the last two years. His derangement was only temporary." She could not let any one go on supposing Doctor Carrol to have been insane at the time of his death. For Jessie was convinced that he had been in the possession of a sound mind for the time she had mentioned, at least; otherwise she would not have regarded as binding the promise she had made him. She would not feel herself pledged to carry out the whim of an insane man. Whatever was the mysterious confession which that letter contained, she had for some time felt sure that in the making of it, the overburdened heart and brain had found relief.

"Why, child, what an idea! Doctor Carrol not insane for the last two years! I do not think his family would claim so much for him," Miss Norberry had responded, with her usual asperity where the doctor was concerned.

To this Jessie did not reply. She was content with the defence she had made, and not caring to differ from her aunt needlessly, was silent.

Without being able to give any very good reason for it, Jessie had of late felt that the doctor's wife did not care as formerly to see her, and she had therefore quite given up going to Elm Brook Farm. Since mother and son both seemed estranged, she had hesitated to force herself upon them, though the loss of their friendship had been no small trial to her.

"Then you consider Grey's translation the better of the two? I had given the preference to Halleck's myself, having often heard my brother speak of it."

"Yes; Grey's is a more literal translation of the original, as well as a more scholarly and finished work, though I am aware that Halleck's has long been the standard."

Miss Norberry and the doctor were speaking of a work which she intended to give her brother as a holiday remembrance; and now followed a discussion of the relative merits of the two translations.

Jessie heard this as she heard the distant hum

of the street, and it made no more impression upon her senses ; but she presently remembered that time was slipping away, and she had yet to make some preparations for her contemplated journey.

She would be obliged to tell her aunt at once that she was going, and evidently would have to make her announcement before the doctor ; for he apparently had no thought of leaving at present.

“Aunty, I am sorry to disturb you, but I have just learned that I shall be obliged to go to New York to-night, and I wish to take the eight o'clock train. So if you and the doctor will excuse me, I will go and make my arrangements.” There was, perhaps, a nervous tremor in Jessie's voice as she said this, but certainly no indecision.

“Certainly, Miss Jessie ; and pray do not let me detain you a moment,” the doctor said, with his usual courtesy. Then consulting his watch, asked if he could not assist her in any way, adding, “You have scant time if you have much to do.”

“Thank you, but my preparations will not take many minutes, as I have very little baggage with me,” replied Jessie, who saw that the doctor could render her better aid now by remaining just where he was, than by any more active service, since his

presence was evidently a curb upon her aunt. For Miss Norberry had replied, with remarkable self-control for her, "Of course you do not for a moment contemplate going to New York alone; and you certainly do not expect me to accompany you at an hour's notice?"

"No, Aunt, I do not expect you to accompany me; but I must go to-night." There was the dignity of a settled purpose in Jessie's tone and manner which for a moment cowed her aunt, who quickly recovered herself, however, enough to respond, —

"Pshaw, child! You know I shall not allow you to go to New York alone," and as if this settled the matter, she turned to the doctor, who had risen to go, and proposed showing him a list of books which had that noon been sent her from the publishers, and from which she was to make a selection in the morning.

While Miss Norberry went for this, Jessie and the doctor were left alone. For a moment neither spoke, and then, with a gesture of appeal, Jessie said: "Do not think me an arrant coward, Doctor, when I tell you that it is a terrible thing to me to brave Aunt's authority — that I haven't a bit of

courage in doing it. But I must go to New York. I am bound by a solemn promise to do so, and if you will help me I shall be forever grateful." Jessie was prevented from being more explicit as to what she wanted the doctor to do for her, by her aunt's entrance at this moment.

The doctor had read in the girl's troubled face and manner a necessity for immediate action, and as soon as Miss Norberry had concluded her voluble comments upon the list she had brought him, and to which he had replied as politeness dictated, he changed the subject by saying : —

"As Miss Jessie is obliged to take this journey, allow me to offer myself as her escort. I shall be under the necessity of going to New York within a few days, and I can as well go to-night as any time. So, if you will trust her to my care, I will see her safely home."

The doctor had addressed Miss Norberry rather than her niece, and it had proved a most politic move.

"I am sure you are very kind, Doctor. If Jessie were going to New York I should feel she was most fortunate in having your company," returned that lady, who was tactician enough not to weaken

the position she had taken by seeming even to consider the matter.

"Then you would trust her to me?" the doctor interposed.

"I should consider myself most fortunate in finding her such an escort," was Miss Norberry's suave response while removing the wrapper from a parcel she had brought in with her. This proved to be a Latin Testament which she designed giving her nephew Allan, and presently she was descanting upon the type, style of binding, etc., in a way which would have led one to suppose this matter wholly engrossed her thoughts.

Jessie, however, understood this fit of loquacity. Her aunt intended to keep the doctor engaged in conversation, giving her no chance to leave the room until it was too late to put her plan in execution; for in strict etiquette she could not go, as their visitor was still standing. Evidently it must be settled at once if at all, but now she would have two to meet instead of one, as the doctor had only complicated matters in seeking to serve her.

The most she had thought of his doing was that he might intercede for her with her aunt, and prove an ally against that lady's opposition.

"I appreciate the kindness of your offer, Doctor, but I cannot allow you to put yourself to so much trouble," she said in the first pause in the conversation, "so I will bid you good-night, and beg you to excuse my leaving you so abruptly;" and then, with a nod and smile, she had quitted the room.

"Whatever can the child mean? She is certainly beside herself to talk of going to New York alone. What am I to do, Doctor?" Evidently for once Miss Norberry was nonplussed.

"I do not see that you can do anything," was the doctor's reply.

"But I don't understand what whim she can have got into her head. Of course if it were really necessary she should go I could change my arrangements and accompany her." It now occurred to Miss Norberry that she might be standing in her own light to further oppose her niece. It was certainly poor policy to decry Jessie to the man whom she hoped might one day be her husband; and she had decided on a change of tactics when the doctor interposed.

"Miss Jessie may certainly be trusted to know her own business, and since she says her going is imperative, you would be doing very wrong to put

any obstacle in her way. But give yourself no uneasiness about her. I will go with her, and see that she suffers no harm. The train leaves precisely at eight, and we have a scant hour and a half," the doctor added, looking at his watch, "which will just give me time to send a telegram to my sister, make a few arrangements, and meet Miss Jessie at the station."

Promising Miss Norberry that she should hear from them as soon as they reached New York, he took his leave of that lady, having first won from her a reluctant consent to her niece's purpose.

Nevertheless, when Jessie, equipped for her journey, sought her aunt's room to bid her good-by, that lady's wrath broke over the girl's devoted head. She bade her remember that she was going without her consent, and that in acting in direct opposition to her wishes, she had forfeited all right to her regard.

"I am truly sorry to do so, Aunty, but if I did not know that you would forgive me when I come back and tell you why I was forced to such a step, it would be a great deal harder for me to take it," and pressing a kiss upon the stern face in which there was no sign of relenting, Jessie was gone.

Possibly the quarterly installment of her income which she had that day drawn in her own name, had been a help to her in standing by her purpose. That money in her pocket may have proved a reminder that she was now legally her own mistress, though this was her first assertion of her rights.

On her way to the station Jessie stopped at her Aunt Wilson's, where she made a hurried visit to the chamber which she always occupied when there. For two years Doctor Carrol's letter had lain in one of the drawers of an escritoire in this room. While transferring it now to her satchel, Jessie seemed to see the doctor as he had looked that day when she voluntarily renewed her promise, pledging herself to carry out his wishes in regard to it. The memory of that sad face as it had lighted up for a moment seemed to give her strength and courage, and she returned to the carriage with her heart lightened of half its burden.

She had adroitly parried her Aunt Wilson's questions, and that lady had only elicited the fact that Jessie was on her way to the station to take the train somewhere, and that scant time had prevented any explanation.

Jessie was no less troubled than surprised to

find Doctor Forney awaiting her at the station, and to learn his determined purpose to accompany her on this journey.

Beside his own desire to serve her, the doctor urged his promise to her aunt by which he declared himself bound, and since Jessie herself had nothing stronger to advance than the obligation of a promise for the step she was taking, she could not deny the doctor's plea, though, truth to say, she accepted his escort very reluctantly.

They were no sooner on board the train than she took the first opportunity to tell him that she had not been quite open with her aunt in giving her to suppose that she was simply going to New York City, as her destination was really a small town in the interior of New York State.

"But you will not think of going further than the city," she said, in making this explanation, reminding the doctor of the loss of time which such a journey would entail upon him.

"But I promised to bring you home, did I not?" he returned, smiling.

"But your business! You did not know to what you committed yourself when you made that promise"

Jessie evidently meant that he should weigh the consequences of the step he was about to take.

"Oh! my business can wait. And now, Miss Jessie, unless you positively forbid me, I shall go with you to your journey's end. But if you should not allow me your company it would not absolve me from my promise to your aunt. I should still follow and care for you till I saw you safely home. Let me set you right in this matter," the doctor continued. "You must not think that the taking of this journey is a trouble to me, or even a hindrance to my work. It will interfere with no engagement; and I promise myself much pleasure from it — in fact I feel like a schoolboy getting off on a holiday, and I mean to forget I am not one; so if I do anything particularly wild or foolish, I hope you will excuse me."

Jessie laughed.

"I am afraid you have chosen a poor companion for your holiday; for I feel like a disobedient girl who has run away from home, and I cannot forget that I am in disgrace there in consequence," she said, a suspicious moisture coming into her eyes ere she had finished.

"I see," returned the doctor. "You are naughty

so seldom that it does not agree with you. Obedience," he continued, "is a lesson we all have to learn as children, and I fancy you learned yours rather better than most children. But there comes a time in every one's life when they must decide the right and the wrong for themselves.

"Your aunt naturally wishes to retain the control over you which circumstance has given her, and which she has so long exercised ; for a love of power is inherent in a nature like hers. But if I am not mistaken, she has some hard lessons yet to learn before she will be willing to accord you your divine right of a personal choice in matters which will make your life's weal or woe."

"That may be all true, but such reasoning fails to reconcile me to myself ; for I cannot forget that aunty has given me nearly twenty years of her life, and that my disobedience will be all the harder to her that she has not learned the lessons you speak of," was Jessie's reply, finding it convenient to veil her annoyance in this way.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NIGHT JOURNEY.

THE train was moving out of the station, and Jessie's attention was now drawn to their fellow passengers, who, with a few exceptions, were all men. Directly in front of her were two ladies who seemed to be without male escort, and at the farther end of the car was a young girl quite alone.

Whenever Jessie had been over this route before she had had the company either of her uncle or her Aunt Helen, and she was curious to learn whether she would have been the only lady travelling alone that night, had the doctor not insisted upon being her escort. She had taken such a possibility into account in making her plans, realizing all the unpleasantness of the situation; so she was glad to find that there would have been others of her own sex to have kept her in countenance on this night journey.

Now she found herself wishing that she were

alone, that she might make the acquaintance of this girl who was apparently circumstanced as she had expected to be. Had this girl defied her friends to take this journey alone ; and was she feeling the solitariness of her position ?

That she was quite young and slight in form was evident even at this distance, and her dress and travelling equipments suggested good taste and refinement. A close gray veil was tied over her hat, hiding the outline of her face, but the hand which arranged this veil from time to time, was small and daintily gloved.

The passengers were beginning to settle themselves into comfortable positions for napping, as a four-hours ride was before them ; this being the boat express, and the train not so crowded but that in many instances a whole seat was available.

Long after Jessie had succumbed to fatigue, and gladly had recourse to her travelling shawl for a pillow, she noticed that her young fellow passenger, who was evidently a novice at night journeying, still kept her upright position.

Jessie was conscious of having been asleep when the train came suddenly to a standstill, and she saw that the passengers were leaving the car.

"We need be in no hurry, as the train does not go farther ; but I am glad for your sake, Miss Jessie, of this break in the journey," the doctor was saying, when, looking up, Jessie encountered a pair of large, wondering eyes fixed upon her, which might have belonged to a child of six years. The next moment she saw that these troubled questioning orbs were the property of her fellow passenger about whom she had speculated earlier in the evening.

Something in the sweet childish face appealed to Jessie, and putting out her hand just as the girl was being jostled past her, she said,—

"Are you alone, child?" and the next moment she had drawn the unresisting girl out of the crowd.

"Yes ; and I am ever so frightened. I was never on the night train before," was the latter's naive reply as she nestled close to Jessie's side.

"I do not wonder ; but you need not be afraid any more : keep close to us, and we will look out for you," was Jessie's sympathetic rejoinder as she followed the doctor out of the car, wondering who could have had the heart to trust such an irresponsible child to take care of herself.

"Oh ! I am ever so glad," was the grateful response.

Doctor Forney had taken the precaution to telegraph for staterooms on the boat, so Jessie and her young *protégé* found themselves at once provided with sleeping accommodations, while the doctor assured them he should be near at hand, as their staterooms were contiguous.

"I think you were awfully good to let me come with you. I never was on a night boat in my life, and I did dread it so much. Uncle John wrote me to be sure and not get asleep on the train and be left; but he needn't have been afraid, for I couldn't have shut my eyes for two minutes," was the ingenuous declaration of Jessie's companion the moment they found themselves alone. The next she told her that her name was Katie Brent, and that she had been attending school in Boston.

"But I haven't told you how I happened to be alone," Katie continued. "I got a letter from Uncle John yesterday morning, with word to come right home because mamma is very sick; and I had to come alone, because he couldn't leave to fetch me. - Papa is dead, and Uncle John takes care of mamma and me."

"Do you live in New York?" Jessie asked, wondering, if so, why she had been sent East to school.

"O, no! My home is in Lawson, and I shall not reach there till to-morrow afternoon. I have to take the train at eight o'clock in the morning, on the Michigan Central."

"Then you will go all the way with us, for that is our route. We stop at Arlington," was Jessie's reply.

"Why, Arlington is only ten miles beyond Lawson. Of course we take the same train. Isn't that splendid? We have friends in Arlington, and mamma and I often drive over there," Katie added.

It was on Jessie's tongue to ask her if she knew Doctor Landford; but a question which Katie put at the moment drove it entirely from her mind.

"Is Doctor Forney any relation? or is he your—friend?" Katie added with a little hesitation.

"No; he is not related to me, but he was my father's friend when I was a little girl, and now that my father is dead, he is my friend; and he has come this journey purposely to take care of me." Jessie's tone was the least bit incisive as she said this, and a pair of large blue eyes were turned quickly upon her. But apparently Katie found nothing discomfiting in the kindly eyes that met her own, for she said at once, —

“How good of him! It must be very nice to have such a friend to take care of one; and then he is so—not exactly handsome, but distinguished looking.”

Jessie had not yet felt the need of a protector on this journey, nor had she quite reconciled herself to having one. The peculiar nature of her errand made the doctor's care savor too much of espionage to be entirely agreeable to her, but she replied, — “Yes; he is very kind to put himself to so much trouble for me,” and then she bade Katie try and sleep, or she might be ill on the morrow.

To her surprise, the child (for she was little more than one) subsided at once.

“What is the matter, dear, are you ill?” Jessie asked, when, presently, hearing a sob, she became conscious that her young companion was crying.

“No; but I was thinking of mamma. I am afraid she will die, for Uncle John wrote she was very sick.”

“Oh! I hope not. You are tired to-night, and so you see the dark side. She may be very much better now than when your uncle wrote. Perhaps you will go to sleep quicker if I lie down with you,” Jessie said kindly.

Room was at once made for her, and she was no sooner beside her young friend than a pair of soft, caressing arms stole about her neck.

"I thought you were so tired that you would go right to sleep," she said.

"I kept thinking about mamma, and I could not," was Katie's reply ; but a little later her deep and regular breathing told that sleep had now overtaken her. Evidently she had felt lonely, and in finding companionship in the near presence of her friend, she had also found rest.

By this time, however, Jessie was so wide awake that sleep in her own case seemed out of the question, though she could but feel thankful for the impulse which had prompted her to take this girl into her care, since Katie would have been likely to suffer untold agonies alone, besides the risk to which she would have been exposed of falling into companionship which might have sullied the purity of her young life.

CHAPTER XIX.

REVELATIONS.

THE morning train North from New York took our little party of travellers. The doctor had found time in some miraculous manner to supply himself with a small carpet bag, plethoric, however, in its proportions. He laughingly affirmed in bringing it into the car that he had not much idea what was in it ; but since it was the fashion to have such an appendage, he had thought best to procure one.

Jessie had not before realized the hasty preparations which the doctor had been obliged to make for this journey ; or the fact that he had come away without those conveniences of the toilet which even twenty-four hours make necessary.

“ I am afraid, Doctor, that you did not count the cost when you proposed yourself as knight-errant to a headstrong girl,” she said a little ruefully ; for this reminder of his needs showed her the inconvenience to which he must have been subjected.

“ This service is not service, so being done, but

being so allowed," returned the doctor, smilingly adding, "Should one always count the cost of a pleasure? I know that moralists prate of the wisdom of doing so; but I shall take refuge for any such imprudences in the more pleasing philosophy which bids us seize and be thankful for all the opportunities that the gods offer."

A moment before Jessie had been reminded of the unconventional position in which she found herself, as a handsome pair of grays were driven up to the station, and from the carriage had alighted a young lady whom she had more than once met in the upper circles of New York society.

But Miss Viola Hammersmith had not seen her as she crossed the waiting room with friends who were to take the train; and Jessie had been saved introductions and explanations which would at least have been embarrassing.

The bright morning, and the prospect of no more changes, had transformed Katie Brent who was fairly beaming with life and fun; nothing having in it the least element of ludicrousness escaped her.

The scenery through which they were soon passing was new to Jessie, and unconsciously she had

given herself up to observation of the country, leaving Katie and the doctor, who had become very good friends, to amuse themselves.

After a time she was conscious of the doctor's leaving the car, and presently her train of thought was broken by Katie's touching her on the shoulder, and asking if she intended to stay in Arlington long.

"I hope to get through my business there in a few hours," was Jessie's reply; and then the question which she had been about to ask Katie the night before, recurred to her.

"I believe you said you were acquainted in Arlington. Do you know Doctor Landford there?"

"O, yes! That is, I have often seen him. He was called in to consult with our own physician when papa was sick. But he isn't there now, you know; he moved out West as much as two years ago."

"Not in Arlington now?" was Jessie's exclamation.

"No; he went out West and bought a farm. Then you didn't know he'd gone away, and have come all this distance to see him?" said Katie, struck by the troubled look on her friend's face.

"Yes; I have come all this way to see him. How very unfortunate that he should have moved away. You are quite sure he has?" she asked, finding herself hoping that Katie was mistaken.

"O, yes! He gave up practice because his health was failing, and it's certainly two years since he went away." Katie evidently knew of what she was talking.

Glancing up at the moment, Jessie saw the doctor on the car-platform in conversation with another passenger, and suddenly remembered that what she had just learned would affect him as much as herself.

How was she to tell him that this journey to Arlington was a wild-goose chase, after all, since the man she sought was not there? If she had been alone this circumstance would have lost half its annoyance to her just then.

Why had the doctor insisted upon coming with her? She must think what to do now, and she found herself hoping that the doctor would not return to his seat beside her until she had arranged her course of action.

Since Katie did not know where in the West Doctor Landford was, there seemed nothing else

to do but to keep on to Arlington, where he had formerly lived, and where they would be able to learn his present residence; for she could not abandon her purpose. If he were living she must find him.

The undertaking had suddenly assumed a different aspect, however. If she were obliged to greatly extend her journey, she must write her friends, as she had no right to cause them needless anxiety by a prolonged absence.

And now Jessie felt that she had made a mistake in leaving her aunt entirely in the dark as to her errand. She should have told her that it was something which she had promised to do for Doctor Carrol; and that lady was not so obtuse but she would have recognized a promise to the dead as a binding obligation. She would write and tell her Aunt Helen this on reaching Arlington.

But there was the doctor still to be told. How would he take the communication which she must at once make him—that Arlington was not, after all, to be the end of her journey? Jessie wished now that she had not been so reticent with him. Since she must make him some explanation, she determined to be even more explicit in doing so

than it seemed well to be with her aunt at the present stage of affairs.

She had just decided as to how far she would be justified in committing herself, when the doctor returned to his seat, bringing with him an assortment of reading matter.

"Now you will have something with which to amuse yourselves," he said, distributing it between Jessie and her companion.

"Doctor, I have a confession to make," said the former, as he took his seat beside her.

"I can promise you absolution all the same, without hearing it," was his reply.

"You may not be so ready to absolve me when you learn that in part, at least, my confession is compulsory," Jessie returned, frankly meeting the kindly eyes turned upon her.

"Not at all compulsory. Tell me just as much or as little as you please. I have asked no questions, because I know I may trust you; and if you tell me nothing, I shall still do so," was the doctor's hearty rejoinder.

"You are very kind, but I see now that I ought to have told you in the first place, that my errand to Arlington is on business for Doctor Carrol."

“Ah! Did his death make this business necessary, may I ask?”

“Yes; I made him a promise more than two years ago, which was to be kept as soon as I heard of his death. It was simply to deliver a letter to his old friend, Doctor Landford. But Doctor Carrol did not wish it should be received till after his death; and it contained a communication of such importance that even then he did not wish it trusted to the mails. But meanwhile he charged me to say nothing of it to any one, and that charge sealed my lips when I could give no reason for taking this journey. I have never before mentioned it, and I should not now, only that circumstances have conspired to make it necessary.

“You perhaps know,” Jessie went on, “that Doctor Carrol was subject to strange fits of depression; but you may never have heard that he accused himself, at times, of a great crime. From his own words, I gather that this letter is an explanation of the matter which has long been a mystery to his family. For some reason, he seemed to take a fancy to me, and to feel that he could leave what he called his confession, in my hands; though why he should have done so I have never

understood. You may say I was unwise to take such a trust, and I assure you I regretted afterward having done so ; but the circumstances of my accepting it were peculiar. Later, when I tried to return this letter to the doctor, and be free of any obligation in the matter, he seemed so distressed that I relinquished my purpose. His evident grief and disappointment that I should wish to do so made me repent my unwillingness to execute so small a service for him, and I voluntarily bound myself then by a solemn promise, to carry the letter to Doctor Landford. And now comes my reason for telling you this story. It seems Doctor Landford is not in Arlington, as I supposed. I have just learned from Miss Katie that he removed from there more than two years ago, — went West and bought a farm ; she does not know just where.”

“So you will be obliged to give up your attempt to find him.” The doctor spoke as if such a proceeding were the only one to be entertained.

“No ; I do not propose to give it up. If Doctor Landford is living and in the country, I do not intend to go home till I find him ; for I feel that my promise to Doctor Carrol holds me to this duty.

I shall go on to Arlington and learn Doctor Landford's present place of abode, and then I will write to Aunty, giving her some explanations which will account for my prolonged absence."

"I do not wish to dissuade you, Miss Jessie, from doing what you feel to be a duty, but do you not exaggerate the obligation? Have you considered the difficulties that may lie in your way? This is a big country. Have you realized what 'West' might mean? Doctor Landford may have gone beyond the pale of civilization," Doctor Forney continued; "for there is no accounting for the eccentric freaks which may take a man afflicted with the farm-mania, particularly one who has been tied up all his life to a profession. What if your quest should take you to Kansas or Nebraska?"

"The prospect of a long journey does not intimidate me," was Jessie's reply. "My only trouble is" — she hesitated before adding — "that you will feel yourself obliged to go with me."

"Do you wish to go alone?" the doctor asked gravely.

"No; to be frank, I do not. It would be much pleasanter to have company. But I have no right

to expect or accept such a sacrifice of your time and plans, to say nothing of any other trouble to which it would put you. And, Doctor, I want to assure you now that I am not ungrateful for all your kindness, though it shames me to remember how ungraciously I accepted your company."

That he had held his position on sufferance only, the doctor had been well aware; but even then he had found pleasure in it. Under other circumstances he might have counselled waiting until Doctor Landford could be heard from, or till the time of year was more favorable for travelling, but he did neither.

"I will forgive you for any sins against myself in that direction, either real or imaginary," he said; and then added more seriously, "but is a man's promise not every whit as binding upon him as a woman's upon her? You rather put me to shame when you infer that so slight an obstacle as a long journey will keep me from fulfilling mine to your aunt. Is it quite fair to doubt that anything which I can do for you will give me pleasure, Miss Jessie? If you propose crossing the continent, I am at your service." There was a sincerity in the doctor's words and manner which touched Jessie.

No; it was not fair to doubt him after such proof as he had given her : and would she be wise to exchange his companionship for that of her aunt, even if she could be persuaded to go with her ?

For it had occurred to Jessie that she might wait in Arlington for her relative to join her. But, truth to say, she did not find the thought of this agreeable.

“Doctor, I shall be truly grateful if you will go with me; but it will always be on my conscience to have put you to so much trouble,” was her hearty response.

“Not at all, Miss Jessie; Colorado or California, just as you say. It is all the same to me,” was his gracious reply.

“Oh! I hope it will not take us quite to the Antipodes,” laughingly rejoined Jessie.

This conference had been carried on in so low a tone that even Katie on the next seat knew nothing of its import. She was aware that her friends were engaged in earnest conversation, but at the doctor's last cheery rejoinder, the tone of which only she had caught, she held up a grotesque cartoon, and her lively comments upon it produced a

merry laugh from her friends, and the conversation became general.

Though the morning had seemed to promise a pleasant day, the afternoon proved gray and low-ery; and in the early falling shadows of evening Jessie and the doctor took leave of Katie Brent. From the car window they saw their late companion driven away in her uncle's carriage, receiving from her a parting salute in the kiss she had thrown them, her bright face being a sufficient guaranty that no sad tidings had awaited her.

CHAPTER XX.

WESTWARD BOUND.

DOCTOR LANDFORD had moved to Kansas, our friends were informed on reaching Arlington, and that he was living, and very much improved in health for the change, his old neighbors who heard from him often, were able to affirm.

The following night found Jessie and the doctor at Rochester, whence they started on their Westward-bound journey. Our readers must know that this was before palace and sleeping cars whirled one over the rails in happy unconsciousness of travelling: when the cramped quarters of the ordinary railroad car were perhaps accepted with as little murmuring as are the more luxurious accommodations of the present time.

On passing through Indianapolis, the second night of their journey, Jessie was roused from an unrestful nap by the lights of the station flashing into the car, and the noise and bustle of entering and departing passengers. Human nature had

never looked quite so forlorn to her as did some of the people who had been waiting for this midnight train, and she found herself sympathizing with their expressions of thankfulness when they and their belongings were comfortably disposed aboard the car.

As they ran out of the station Jessie saw that it was snowing, but fatigue had soon made her again unconscious of her surroundings. The country over which they were speeding the following morning lay several feet deep in snow; and it was still falling, making a dreary outlook from the car window, and one from which our friends turned with an undefined feeling of dread.

As the day advanced the storm increased, or rather they were running into it, as soon became apparent. The railroad officials seemed to apprehend no trouble from it, however, when they left St. Louis that afternoon, and relying upon what they said, rather than upon his own judgment, the doctor had decided to go on.

By dark a second engine was telegraphed for, as fears were now entertained that they would not be able to get through, having found the snow on the prairies deeper than had been calculated upon.

They received their accession of steam at Stickney, where they had waited for it, a small dreary town in Eastern Missouri, which boasted of but one public house, and that of anything but an inviting character.

Had the town promised ordinary comforts the doctor would have proposed stopping over. Later he regretted that they had not taken such accommodations as Stickney offered; for they had accomplished but a few miles when they found themselves unable to proceed.

One of their engines had given out, and the other was entirely inadequate to make its way through the drifts here encountered.

The outlook was now most discouraging, for the next station was all of ten miles beyond, and in their rear was the disabled engine; so to advance or go back was alike impossible.

A council was held, the result of which was that the greater part of the passengers went to the help of the train hands; and after considerable labor and delay they cleared their snow-bound engine, and were once more in motion, having left the disabled one on the track.

To reach the next station was now the limit of

their hopes, but even this was not to be realized, for, scarcely a mile on, they encountered another blockade more formidable than the first ; and now the wind and driving sleet made an attempt at clearing the track impracticable. There was nothing to be done but wait where they were till morning, when it was hoped the storm would have abated.

Jessie had known early in the evening that apprehensions were entertained of their not getting through ; but the most she had feared had been delay. That they would be storm-bound on the open prairies had not occurred to her.

When they left Stickney with the second engine she had supposed there would be no more trouble, and had settled down hoping to sleep and get relief from the blinding headache with which she had all the afternoon been suffering.

As night came on the cold grew intense, and this now proved another discomfort to our travelers. If the doctor had not wisely taken the precaution to provide extra wraps at Rochester, they would have been poorly prepared to encounter the biting wind which penetrated every corner of the frail structure which was their only shelter from the storm.

Fuel was not short, and a good fire was kept in the stove; but it seemed to make little impression upon the atmosphere a few feet away from it, and round it were huddled those of the passengers who could come within the radius of its warmth.

Fatigue and anxiety had by midnight induced the severest headache to which Jessie had ever been a victim, and though she would gladly have kept all knowledge of her suffering from the doctor, she found it impossible to suppress all expression of distress.

So, added to the other exigencies of the situation, the doctor's mind was harrowed by the fear that Jessie would succumb to the hardships of this journey. Unless rest and proper care were soon to be had, she would be really ill, if indeed not so already.

It was the keenest torture to him to know that she was suffering, and to find himself helpless to relieve her. The moan that now and then escaped her lips was like a stab to his heart. He had been an insensible brute to let this delicate girl attempt such a journey. He should not have permitted her to come out here to these Western wilds at this time of year. In the bitterness of his spirit

that he was powerless to save her from her present suffering, he accused himself of having been led by the promptings of his own selfish heart which found such delight in her presence, rather than by the consideration of her true welfare.

That Jessie had been firm in her purpose to take this journey even against his remonstrance did not count with him now. He was a man, and knew the perils of such an undertaking better than she did ; and he should not have allowed it. She would have listened to reason had he presented the case to her as it was his duty to have done. Now if anything happened to her, how should he meet the friends who were trusting her to his care ?

This man's feelings were not to be envied as he paced the aisle of that railroad car the greater part of the night ; for the intense cold made movement imperative, since he had used, early in the evening, every available wrap to protect Jessie.

If he could have seen her eyes close, and know that she was sleeping, he would have found the situation far less trying ; but to meet at every turn the flushed face and the mute suffering in her eyes tortured him almost to madness.

When the long-looked-for morning dawned it was found that the storm had indeed abated, though a vast sheet of snow in mountainous drifts lay in unbroken whiteness about them, and not a habitation within miles.

As soon as it was fairly light a number of the train hands had started for Stickney to get help, and with them had gone some half-dozen of the passengers to procure provisions.

The doctor had proposed making one of the party, thinking to find something in the town to relieve Jessie's head, a commission which he could hardly depute to another, but she would not hear to his leaving her, and he reluctantly yielded to her entreaties not to do so, though he had liberally contributed to the purse made up for supplies.

A feverish unrest seized Jessie if the doctor quitted her side even for a moment ; and the thought of having him gone for hours filled her with a nervous terror.

Among the passengers was but one person to whom Jessie felt herself in the least drawn, and that was a woman whose tidy, though rusty, black dress bespoke respectable poverty.

In one of the intervals in which the doctor had

left her to take an outlook at the weather, Jessie had first spoken to Mrs. Mitchel, and learned that she was a minister's widow, and a native of New England. But it seemed she had lived for the last thirty years in the West, and was now returning from a visit in Eastern Missouri to her home in Kansas where she owned a small place.

Her sweet, serene face had first attracted Jessie, and on making her acquaintance the pleasing impression was borne out; for Mrs. Mitchel was a lady, though bearing the evidences of poverty and hard work in her dress and person. Somehow this woman's presence gave Jessie a sense of protection, for the beautiful girl found herself the object of more attention than was at all pleasing; and but for Mrs. Mitchel being near she would have dreaded the doctor's leaving her for a moment.

Few of us find it easy to be heroic and unselfish while our nerves are crying out with pain which takes all our strength to bear.

The morning had brought Jessie no relief from the distress in her head, while the murmuring and complaints of those about her, who were suffering far less discomfort, had become nearly unbearable.

Only to be alone, anywhere, it mattered not where. For one blessed hour of entire seclusion Jessie felt she would willingly have sacrificed most anything that she possessed. But no ; her present torture must be borne, and there was no calculating how long.

By noon she began to regret that she had opposed the doctor's going to Stickney ; for the men who had left in the morning for supplies had not yet returned, and she remembered that the doctor had not eaten a proper meal since his dinner the day before, at St. Louis.

Before leaving the hotel there he had taken the precaution to have some sandwiches put up for Jessie's lunch, as she had eaten a very light dinner. Two of these she had that morning given Mrs. Mitchel, but there were more left in her basket as well as some crackers and cake.

Having no disposition herself to eat, she had not remembered this food till she heard those about her complaining of hunger. Finding she could not induce the doctor to make use of it she proposed that he should give it to a young woman in the next seat, who had a child with her ; but this he declined to do

"You will be able to eat something yourself by and by, and possibly no supplies will reach us to night," he said, as a reason for not doing as she wished.

This possibility had not occurred to Jessie, but it was on his account that it now gave her concern.

"What will you do? You have eaten nothing to-day," she said earnestly. "Do take one of these sandwiches to please me."

"I think I shall get along as well as the rest," he said, smiling. But on her further urging the basket upon him, he consented to give its contents to those who seemed most in need, provided she would allow him to go and get something fresh for herself; otherwise it should not be disturbed.

"But I do not need anything. Believe me, I could not eat the most tempting dish in the world, so do not keep food for me that others are suffering for. I was selfish, however, in not letting you go to Stickney with the rest, for there you could have had a warm dinner. I see I did wrong to keep you."

"It is not too late now," he returned; "if you think you can get along for a few hours, it will

not take me longer. I shall be back, if possible, before dark, with something you will be able to eat, I hope," he said, acting at once upon her concession. Before she could remonstrate he passed the basket to Mrs. Mitchel, telling her to help herself, and distribute the remainder.

"And you did not take so much as a cracker," Jessie said regretfully, as the basket was returned.

Before leaving the car the doctor installed Mrs. Mitchel in his place, bidding her take good care of Miss Norberry till his return, and then, with a lingering glance at the flushed face, he was gone.

Three weary hours passed, and then it was announced that the party, who had left in the morning, were in sight; and a few minutes afterward they boarded the train. It seemed they had met the doctor within a mile of Stickney, all right, but they predicted he would not be back that night, as he would never be able to face the wind, which was fearful.

They reported the telegraph wires all down, so no aid was to be expected through them. But workmen had come out from Stickney who were already patching up their disabled engine in order that they might get through with it.

It was evident at once that liquor had been procured in town as well as food, for the returning party were far more hilarious than circumstances seemed to warrant.

When the supplies were passed around among the passengers, Jessie courteously, but firmly declined what was pressed upon her acceptance. She had turned with loathing from the cold ham and hard biscuit and cheese, though her refusal of the food had shown nothing of this.

She could not eat anything. She had no appetite, she said, but thanked those who were anxious that she should have her share.

"Well, if you can't eat, this is just the stuff that will cure you," said a half-tipsy man, thrusting a bottle in her face, with the rough injunction, "Take some of it, and it will bring the appetite."

A glance at the man who proffered it, showed Jessie that her best course would be to ignore the offered panacea, since it would be futile to argue with a person in his condition.

Her tacit rejection of the liquor, or Mrs. Mitchell's timid protest against his forcing upon the young lady what she did not want, seemingly angered the drunken man, who with an oath raised

the bottle, and the next instant it would have been flung in Jessie's face, had not the uplifted hand been suddenly dashed aside. The next moment sturdy arms had pinioned the half-tipsy man, while muttered imprecations were coupled with the command to let the young lady alone.

A horror of what she had just barely escaped seized Jessie, and the next moment she had lost all consciousness of what was passing around her. Nature had finally succumbed to the strain brought to bear upon it, and, for the first time in her life, Jessie had fainted.

Mrs. Mitchel was quickly surrounded by those who would have gladly assisted in the restoration of the beautiful girl whose late peril had excited the sympathy of every one about her, and when a few moments later she opened her eyes they rested only on friendly faces.

"Did I faint?" she asked, realizing from the disorder of her dress and surroundings something of the efforts which had been made to restore her.

Then it all came back, — the drunken man with his upraised arm and angry manner, and for a moment it seemed likely that her swoon would be repeated.

From this, however, she had rallied, and Mrs. Mitchel feeling the necessity of quiet for her charge, begged those who had gathered round them, anxious to render aid, to leave her now, that she might sleep, and presently Jessie had fallen into what seemed a comfortable nap.

Then it was the good woman discovered that her companion's satchel had been overturned, and its contents scattered about, in the effort to find cologne or smelling-salts during her faint. And among other things strewn over the seat and upon the floor, was a letter, which, in returning to the bag, her eye happened to fall upon the address, a familiar one to herself.

"I wonder if she knows Doctor Landford? She must have forgotten to mail this letter to him. I'll remind her of it when she rouses up," was Mrs. Mitchel's thought as she restored the letter to her young friend's satchel.

Meanwhile Jessie was entirely unconscious how near she had come to losing the letter which was the cause of all her present trouble and discomfort.

While lying in her semiquiescent state in which her faint had left her, she was feeling herself most fortunate in not having been allowed to come on

this journey alone, which would have happened but for the doctor's kind persistence. Never till now had she realized the limitations to which as a woman she was bound. She had thought that her brave, strong spirit would carry her through whatever it might be necessary to meet ; but this afternoon she had received a lesson which had taught her the weakness and dependence of her sex.

In promising to carry out Doctor Carrol's wishes, she had counted upon no other impediment than the opposition of friends, and the conviction which was now forced upon her, that she could hardly have kept that promise without Doctor Forney's aid, was humiliating in the extreme.

She would be under obligations to him now as long as she lived, since there was no way in which she could repay him for this service.

Yes ; there was one way in which she might cancel this obligation. Why was the thought so repugnant to her ? Certainly she knew of no one to whom she would sooner entrust her interests.

Perhaps it was a relic of schoolgirl sentimentalism which made her feel that for one's husband one should entertain something more than respect and confidence—a warmer feeling even than

admiration for his virtues. Might not such a marriage relation as that of which she had sometimes dreamed be merely a myth? Would not such a complete absorption of one's self in another be a hindrance to higher growth? Was her Aunt Helen entirely in the wrong when she affirmed, as she often did, that women had arrived at a state of beatitude when a lover was not essential to their existence? Jessie had sometimes thought there might be truth in her aunt's logic when she had caught a glimpse of the real life of some of her young married friends.

But why did the doctor not return? She was recalled to the remembrance of this fact by the lamps being lighted in the car. Could anything have happened to him? With a feeling of self-condemnation that she had rested easily so long, while he had been meeting exposure for her—for she felt sure he had gone to town more on her account than his own—she raised herself on her elbow and peered anxiously out into the gathering shadows.

It happened at this moment that the doctor entered the car, and noted the wistful expression of the face turned toward the window pane.

"Back at last, safe and sound. I hope you have not been anxious," he said, reaching her side before she saw him.

Jessie turned quickly, and there was a world of feeling in the soft eyes that she raised to his face, not less beautiful that tears stood in them.

"I'm so glad you have come. Yes; I was growing anxious. Are you not very tired?" she asked, moving her satchel that he might sit down.

"No; I stopped back by the engine where they are at work, and took breath and got warm. But how is your head?"

"It is better, I think," she said, trying, at least, to believe that it was.

"I hope I have brought you something you can eat; but first I want you to drink some of this, as I think it will help your head," the doctor said, proceeding to pour from a can in his hand a mug full of hot tea, telling Jessie in the meantime how the engineer had heated it for him.

Certainly there were none of the evidences of fatigue about the doctor for which she had been prepared; for he stood before her now as fresh and smiling as if he had not just accomplished a feat which would have taxed the strength and en-

duration of a much sturdier man. But if Jessie had seen him half an hour before, when he reached the engine, and was helped on board by some of the workmen, she would scarcely have been prepared for so speedy a recovery.

Jessie thanked the doctor, and sat up and drank her tea like a docile child.

"You are a very good girl," was the doctor's smiling comment as he took from her hand the empty mug. "Presently you shall have the rest of your dinner."

As he spoke, the porter entered with a dish of hot soup, and while she was eating this, the doctor entertained her with an account of his adventures since leaving the train.

The soup which had been served with the doctor's own dinner, he had been sure would not tempt Jessie's appetite, but he did not tell her that he had assisted in making the savory dish he had brought her.

The success of his efforts afforded him no small degree of satisfaction, for Jessie praised the soup, and ate it with a relish which was the strongest argument in its favor.

In keeping this from her the doctor did not sus-

pect, however, that she was returning him his own coin ; for Jessie had begged Mrs. Mitchel to say nothing of her fainting fit, and he was never any wiser in regard to what had happened in his absence, than was she in the matter of his culinary ability.

But if Jessie had ever seemed fair and lovable to the doctor it was that afternoon, when he had found her watching for his return ; and a glad light in her eyes had told him how welcome to her was his sudden appearance. Her bright hair had become loosened from her comb, and lay in wavy luxuriance about her shoulders, while the graceful, easy negligence of her dress seemed to bring her nearer to him than ever before. In her manner, too, there was a subtle change as charming as it was indefinable. He felt himself no longer held at a distance. A soft, winning grace, born of a grateful appreciation of his kindness, had taken the place of the quiet dignity which had been a blending of indifference and hauteur.

Somewhere about midnight our snow-bound travellers were roused by the sudden jar which united the train with the engine, and a little later they were once more in motion, and on their way.

CHAPTER XXI.

SURRENDER.

I HAD no idea we were *en route* for Mont Blanc," was Doctor Forney's thoroughly dismayed ejaculation when morning dawned upon them.

He had known for some time that they were standing still ; but it had taken daylight to reveal the fact that both engines were buried in a mountainous drift which even steam had proved inadequate to force a way through.

On learning how matters stood, it was evident to everyone that there was nothing to do but abandon the train, and try and reach the small German settlement thought to be about two miles distant. Since their last start, Jessie had slept heavily ; even the commotion caused by their suddenly coming to a stand-still had failed to arouse her.

But she must be awakened now, for the passengers were already making preparations to leave the

car, and Mrs. Mitchel had just reminded the doctor that Miss Norberry would not be ready, and prepared to rouse her.

This the doctor would not allow her to do ; for though he dreaded to announce to Jessie their situation, he would not depute it to another. But how could he propose to this girl that she should walk two miles over an unbroken prairie, and in such weather too? What would he not have given to save her this ordeal. He feared already that her strength had been taxed to its utmost limits. How would she bear the exposure, or the toilsome walk that must lie before them, in the teeth of a keen northwest wind, and possibly through drifts which would require all a man's strength to surmount ?

Even for himself it would be an ordeal of suffering, but for this delicate girl who had never known exposure of any kind, it might be death.

For a moment the wild idea seized him not to allow Jessie to leave the train. If the distance to the settlement was not more than a few miles, supplies of food might be sent for. Had cold and hunger been the only foes to face, this might not have been impracticable ; but attacks from Indians were

not unknown in that part of the country, and if they escaped this danger there were still others in the shape of wild beasts.

No; if the rest left the train they must do so too. It was not necessary to waken Jessie, for at this moment she opened her eyes, and seeing all the passengers moving, asked if they had reached Sedley.

Then it was that the doctor announced to her the necessity for their leaving the train, expressing the concern he felt lest she would not be able to bear the exposure.

"I don't know how you will manage, Miss Jessie, but there seems nothing else to be done. I feel as if it is almost suicidal for you to attempt it, though you are likely to perish if you stay here."

Jessie saw something of the struggle which this had cost the doctor, and she said quite cheerfully :

"Oh ! you must not fear for me. I shall no doubt get along as well as the rest. But if we are to walk the remainder of the way to Kansas, we had best be about it," she added, commencing at once to make herself ready.

She insisted upon Mrs. Mitchel's taking one of her wraps, and the other she allowed the doctor to

wind about her head and shoulders in the way he proposed.

“ You have no idea how bleak the wind is on the prairies,” he said solicitously. “ You will need all the protection possible against it.” And Jessie did not demur at any arrangement of her dress which he saw fit to make, though she laughingly compared herself to a mummy when he considered her ready for a start.

Their large lunch basket was left in the car, as well as the doctor's valise ; but Jessie's satchel he insisted upon taking, and strapped it about his waist in order that both hands might be free.

“ Missouri has certainly proved a most unhospitable State to us, but it did not occur to me that we should be held here as hostages of the summer ; for it will surely take July and August to melt these banks of snow,” Jessie said on leaving the car, assuming a gayety she was far from feeling.

The doctor's party for a time kept up with the others, but finally they began to fall behind, and ere long were far in the rear.

The crust upon which they had counted to bear their weight was not even. In places it would do so for some distance, and then for a time their

progress would be by wallowing rather than walking.

Mrs. Mitchel, though advanced in years, had the endurance which a working life had given her, and she now proved herself equal to waging quite a battle with wind and snow, bearing the struggle much better than might have been supposed. But it was soon evident that Jessie's strength was failing. More than once she must have yielded to her desire for rest which was almost overpowering, had not a strong arm closed about her with a vise-like pressure, bearing her along and imparting strength and courage.

"I think we must have wandered into the Arctic regions, and shall never see anything but snow again," she said plaintively when their struggle had been prolonged for more than two hours, and only a limitless expanse of snow was to be seen.

"No ; we are still in inhospitable Missouri," returned the doctor, "but if we do not slump through into China I think we must soon get out of it."

Few words were spoken, for breath was of too much value to waste it in speech ; but that the doctor's thoughts were constantly with her, Jessie found the arm about her waist a convincing proof.

More than once her touching appeal that he would let her rest only for a moment wrung his heart ; but he knew that her life depended upon her keeping in motion. Were she allowed to rest, she would not be able to go on.

“ You will not fail now when you have come so far. Keep up a little longer ; we must soon see the settlement. You have done bravely, and it can't be much farther.” These and like words of encouragement fell from the doctor's lips whenever Jessie's courage was on the point of giving out.

But her form leaned more and more heavily upon him, and he would not have been surprised at any moment had she sunk limp and lifeless in the snow at his feet.

It was something like three hours since they had left the train when they espied in the distance what they thought must be the settlement for which they had started ; and presently a shout from the more forward ones of the party announced this fact.

As they approached, some eight or ten straggling log cabins could be plainly distinguished, but it was the nearest one for which the whole

party started ; and when the doctor came up the house was already full.

Good Frau Steinhauser was doing her best to make her guests comfortable ; but with the most hospitable intent she could not take care of so many, and it was evident that the greater number could only find her house a temporary shelter.

On seeing the doctor and his party enter, the good woman cried out :

“Es gibt andere Häuser in der Stadt. Mein's ist nicht das Einzige. Ich habe keinen Platz für so viele Leute ;” and then her eye falling on Jessie she added : *“Ihre Frau sieht sehr krank aus. Es thut mir Leid.”*

With much gesticulation the good woman communicated the fact that her neighbor Stupp's house just beyond was empty, and that they would find fuel and other things to make them comfortable.

While speaking Frau Steinhauser reached the doctor a key which she had taken from a nail. This would admit him to the shelter she had proposed.

By this time, however, Jessie's exhausted condition had excited general sympathy ; and a movement was made that she might come nearer to

the fire. But she had heard the rude laugh which greeted Frau Steinhauser's mistake, and any place in which she could escape these people would have seemed to her a desirable refuge.

"Let us go there. We shall at least be by ourselves," she said in an undertone to the doctor, and he hesitated no longer.

The owner of this cabin, Jacob Stupp, had buried his wife the week before, and finding the loneliness of the place unbearable afterward, he had gone to town leaving the care of his premises to his neighbor Steinhauser.

In recommending it to the doctor and his party the good Frau had said nothing of the circumstance which had placed it at his disposal ; for so great was the fear of the fever in that region that the simple people thereabouts would nearly as soon have gone shelterless as enter where this disease had lately reigned. But had she told him the story of her neighbor's death, the doctor would have done just as he did, since no other course was open to him. They could not stay where they were, and there was no certainty of faring better had Jessie been able to go farther.

Jacob Stupp's cabin contained but one room,

and its only furniture was a cook-stove, a deal table, two flag-bottomed chairs, an old-fashioned case of drawers, and a cottage bedstead, but a palace would not have been more welcome to the little party who had at once taken possession.

Their rude quarters had soon put on something of an air of comfort, for the doctor found plenty of fuel on the premises, and a roaring fire was ere long sending its warmth into every corner of the cabin.

In rummaging about to find dry clothing for Jessie and herself, Mrs. Mitchel had come upon some clean bedding put carefully away, and the good woman was not slow to utilize it. She was no sooner warm than she seemed to forget her fatigue, and at once went to work to remove Jessie's boots and stockings, and to rub some warmth and life into the girl who, on entering the cabin, had dropped into a chair, from which she had not since moved. For Jessie allowed the woman to take off her wet clothing, and wrap her in Frau Stupp's clean blankets, as passively as a child.

Meanwhile from the cabin's stores the doctor had produced some tea, which he soon had simmering on the fire.

"I don't suppose you will find it the most palatable cup of tea you ever drank, but it is hot, which is the essential thing just now," he said, pouring Jessie a cupful of the decoction he had been making.

Mrs. Mitchel had just prevailed upon her to lie down, but she sat up and drank the tea, since the doctor wished it, though she would rather not have been disturbed.

"It is quite good. Herr Stupp must be something of an epicure," she said, with a dreary attempt at a smile, as she passed him back the cup.

"We shall not starve if the snow embargo is not lifted at once, for if it comes to the worst we can stay the pangs of hunger with black bread and sauerkraut," said the doctor, who had been investigating the larder; but he decided not to disturb these delicacies if other food was to be obtained in the settlement.

While he was putting on his coat to go out in quest of edibles, Mrs. Mitchel happened to go to the closet for something, when her face at once expressed a strong disapprobation of the premises. Had those shelves been filled with the most delicious of dainties, they would hardly have tempted

her appetite after the odor which had met her nostrils. She said nothing, but, looking up, she saw that the doctor was convulsed with merriment.

"I knew it was there, for it made itself evident when I was hunting for the tea," he said, producing from its receptacle a piece of Limburgher cheese. "It hardly seems the thing to take possession of friend Stupp's house and throw away his stores, but I think I will do so in this case," he said, and presently this unsavory morsel had made its exit from the cabin.

"Why, you look as if you were in a high fever. Do you feel sick?" Mrs. Mitchel asked anxiously. She was in the act of putting some dishes on the table, thinking to forward the meal which the doctor had gone out to procure; but she came at once to Jessie's bedside and began testing the temperature of her body.

"I am not sick, but I never was quite so tired in my life," was the girl's languid response.

"I don't like your having so much color. When we came in you were as white as that sheet," returned Mrs. Mitchel, examining her critically.

"Do not fear that I shall be ill: I am very healthy. If I am flushed it is from fatigue, and

you need not be alarmed if I am a little feverish ; it is only the reaction from the cold." Jessie spoke as if it was an effort to do so, but hearing a step outside the door, she said earnestly : " Pray do not show the doctor that you are anxious about me. He has trouble enough now."

A moment later the doctor entered, having canvassed the settlement and procured bread, butter, eggs, sugar, and a few potatoes.

" Now we will soon have some dinner," he said, looking with satisfaction upon Mrs. Mitchel's preparations ; but his countenance quickly changed as he noted the flushed face upon the pillow.

" How are you feeling now ?" he asked.

" Thoroughly lazy, as you see," was her reply ; but finding his fears were not disarmed, she added, " I shall be all right before long ; rest is all I need. If you and Mrs. Mitchel will do the cooking to-day, I'll change places with you to-morrow."

" Are you sure your head does not ache, and that you are not suffering in any way ?" he asked, laying his hand on her forehead as he spoke.

For a moment she allowed it to rest there, and then with a caressing gesture, she clasped it in both her own.

"If you begin to fancy me ill, I shall feel obliged to get up and prove to you that I am not," she said, attempting to rise.

But this the doctor would not allow her to do, and she had lain passively back among the pillows, as if resigned to the situation.

But as night came on it was evident that she was indeed ill; nor could she conceal from her watchful attendants that she was suffering. Ever since her effort to sit up and eat a bit of the egg which the doctor had himself cooked and urged upon her, she had seemed to grow worse.

Early in the evening the doctor had gone to try and find in the settlement some remedy to keep down the fever which he feared would otherwise become settled upon her; and he had been fortunate enough to obtain one with the workings of which he was familiar. Though no one had offered to go to the sick girl, the doctor found plenty ready to offer advice; and in some cases it commended itself to his judgment, particularly when one kindly old soul sent a sedative for a cooling wash.

This Mrs. Mitchel used thoroughly, and it proved very grateful to the sufferer who roused

enough to realize what was being done for her, and then dropped off again into unconsciousness.

All that night Doctor Forney sat by her bedside administering at regular intervals the remedy which he had never known to fail in breaking up a fever, every little while renewing the wet cloth upon her head.

He insisted upon doing this himself, for early in the evening he had seen that Mrs. Mitchel would not be equal to it. The poor woman was completely worn out with the fatigue of the day, and before midnight was sleeping soundly on the cot, which the doctor had improvised by turning the large woodbox over on its side, and piecing this out with the table. It was better than sleeping on the floor where he had feared she would take cold, and proved as restful a couch as perhaps she had ever enjoyed, since there is nothing like fatigue to sweeten rest.

The doctor had assured Mrs. Mitchel that he would get all the sleep he needed, but if he had expected to do so he signally failed.

The hard, straight-backed chair in which his vigil was spent did not invite slumber; but the anxiety he was feeling would probably have ban-

ished sleep had the conditions been much more favorable.

More than once as the hours went on he was startled to the very depths of his nature by Jessie's incoherent talk. Had she indeed grown to care for him as her words seemed to imply? At moments he believed this was so, and then Reason would show him the fallacy of building upon the utterances of delirium. Running along with the involuntary confession of a love which she had heretofore well concealed if he were the object, was the fancy that this journey had been undertaken for his sake.

This complete reversal of the true state of the case was perhaps the method of madness, since there is no reason in unreason; and the doctor found the superstructure of his hopes suddenly swept away.

Daylight was coming in the eastern sky when the sick girl finally sunk into a quiet slumber, and now the doctor braced his chair back against the wall, and in this position gained a comfortable nap.

With morning, Jessie's symptoms were more favorable, and though weak and listless to the last degree, all danger of fever was evidently averted.

And now those of her friends who knew her best would hardly have recognized her in the reaction that at once set in. She who up to this time had made the best of all her discomforts became suddenly unreconciled to the situation.

She could not stay here. She must get away, and there certainly was some means by which they might do so. When finally made to understand that this was impossible, and that they might be detained here a week, she had broken down and cried.

Then it was that the doctor had tried to comfort her much as he would a grieved child.

This state of things continued for three days, Jessie chafing continually at their detention, and insisting that she was able to travel, though scarcely having strength to sit up.

The doctor's patience seemed infinite, and finally won the recognition it deserved.

"I believe you are the kindest and best man that ever lived, and I am the most selfish and hateful of women," she said at last, in a burst of generous frankness. "How can you have been so patient with me all along when I have been so selfish and ungrateful?"

"You are neither the one nor the other. At least, if you are I have failed to see it; perhaps because I love you."

This last admission had slipped from the doctor's tongue involuntarily. He had never meant to speak to Jessie of his love again, since it could only annoy her to do so; but the words had sprung from his heart, and now they could not be unsaid, though they were no sooner uttered than regretted.

"I can hardly credit your loving me, for I am so unworthy," Jessie said, with a sweet humility, "but since you say so, I must believe you, and any woman who could persistently decline a love which so ennobled and honored her must be devoid of every womanly feeling."

The doctor knew that a pair of limpid eyes were bent upon him, but for a moment he could not meet them. Had she meant what her word seemed to imply?

"Am I to understand that you accept the love I offered you two years ago?" he asked, not a muscle of his face changing, so great was the self-control he was exercising.

"Not only that I accept it, but that I shall hence-

forth wear it as my woman's crown. I did not know you two years ago ; and, in fact, I do not believe I do now, for your goodness is a constant surprise to me," was Jessie's impassioned response.

"And you promise to be my wife?" The doctor had taken both her hands in his own as he asked this question, regardless of the fact that they were not alone.

"I promise to be your wife, and to be both proud and happy in the love which I never till now appreciated," Jessie said with gentle earnestness.

"God bless you! So I have won you at last, my treasure," said the doctor, with vehement passion as he gathered her to his breast. It mattered not at this moment that a third party was a witness of his joy, for his happiness had come too unexpectedly to be received with calmness. A man less open and generous in his nature might have veiled his feelings more, but looking up and meeting Mrs. Mitchel's eye, he asked if he were not the most fortunate of men, adding, with reverent tenderness: "Jessie is mine. The Western prairie has given me what I most desired in the world ; and what I might have sued for in vain at home

—this dear girl. Wish me joy, Mrs. Mitchel, in gaining the greatest happiness of my life.”

“I do wish you joy with all my heart,” returned the good woman earnestly ; “for I believe you are worthy of Miss Jessie, and you will agree with me, that is giving you great praise. I am not surprised at such a sequel to your adventure,” she continued, “for Miss Jessie has told me something of the errand which took her out here. She would certainly not be the girl I take her for, if she did not appreciate your kindness and devotion. What either she or myself would have done without such a friend, God only knows. Now, everything will come out as it should : you will marry her and make her happy, for she will realize more and more that in her husband she has one of the best men in the world.”

“Thank you, dear Mrs. Mitchel ; we shall not soon forget how kind a friend we have found in you,” returned Jessie, tears standing in her eyes.

The good woman had now come over to them, and, taking a hand of each, wished them many years of happiness together here, and at the end of life’s journey an abundant entrance into their heavenly home.

It was five days since they had taken possession of Jacob Stupp's cabin, when the doctor came in one morning from a prospecting tour, and said that the road had at last been broken through, and they would be able to proceed on their journey.

"Unless you desire to prolong your stay here we had best be ready in an hour's time," he said, adding with pleasant irony, "Perhaps five days' sojourn in these regions has made you so much in love with it you do not care to leave so suddenly."

"Oh! I think we can tear ourselves away, and as our wardrobe is contained in a hand-bag it will not require a great deal of time for packing," said Jessie, who added with a spice of her old gayety, "The West is no doubt a fine country, but New England is quite good enough for me."

In returning the key to Frau Steinhauser, the doctor did not forget to give that good woman an envelope addressed to Jacob Stupp, in which was a handsome remuneration for the use of his house.

Only those who have been snowbound on our Western prairies can fully appreciate the satisfaction which thrilled the hearts of our travellers when the iron horse was once more bearing them onward.

CHAPTER XXII.

READING THE LETTER.

IT was New Year's eve, and the night of the weekly prayer meeting, and Newbury was all agog. Not for either of the reasons mentioned, however, was the town in its present state of excitement. The day before the minister's niece had reached home, and curiosity to see her, and learn why her mysterious journey had been taken would have been sufficient to create an unusual interest on this occasion, but there was still another reason for bringing the people out to-night.

It had been whispered in the town that a strange gentleman who had come with Jessie from the West, and who was now staying as a guest at the parsonage, would be at the meeting that evening, and make an important communication to the people of Newbury.

No one outside of her uncle's immediate family had seen Jessie since her return, and no particulars had been learned in the town respecting the jour-

ney which had resulted in so much anxiety to her friends.

For after Jessie and the doctor left St. Louis nothing more was heard from them for ten days. That they must have encountered the great storm which had swept the whole Northwest was known ; but as telegraph lines were down all through that section of the country, the extent of its ravages could not be learned.

That the train which Jessie and the doctor had taken was blocked somewhere on the prairies, was more than likely, and that privation and exposure was being endured by all on board, was greatly feared.

Miss Norberry had received a letter from her niece, written at Arlington, in which Jessie had informed her that she was going to Kansas on business which she had promised Doctor Carrol to attend to on his death, but begged her aunt to say nothing of her errand West till her return.

But when reports of the storm reached her friends, and they could learn nothing of her fate, the minister had gone to Milton Carrol and told him the purport of Jessie's letter.

It is needless to say that the doctor's son was

staggered at this announcement, and insisted there must be some mistake, as he was sure that his father had no business relations with any one in that part of the country.

But Mr. Norberry produced the letter, and there it stood in Jessie's own handwriting: "I am going to Kansas on business which I promised Doctor Carrol to attend to on his death. I cannot tell you more at present, for I feel it almost a breech of confidence to the dead, that I have made even this explanation before I have carried out my trust."

This was Milton Carrol's first intimation that there had been any private communication between his father and Jessie. That his father had a peculiar regard for her he was aware, and now it seemed he had trusted her where he had not his own family.

If Milton Carrol could have left the matter here it would have been better for his peace of mind, but as the days went on he was haunted by the fear that the errand which had, perhaps, sent Jessie Norberry to her death, was but a freak of insanity. He knew of no one in the far West with whom his father was even acquainted, and that he

could have had business relations with any one there without his knowledge, seemed impossible.

Milton Carrol stood by the minister's side in the Boston office when the welcome dispatch came over the wires, informing them that Jessie was well, and on her way home. Had this message been of a less happy character, the doctor's son would never have shown his head in Newbury again. He had been a desperate man when he entered that office ; for the five sleepless nights in which he had been haunting the place had well nigh made himself as insane as he feared his father had been when he sent Jessie on this errand.

When he grasped John Norberry's hand with a muttered "Thank God, she is safe !" the minister little suspected the burden of fear and anxiety which had been lifted from his heart.

Had it been otherwise with Jessie Norberry, he knew that another foul charge would have been brought against his dead father's name, and this time not without some shadow of reason ; but he had resolved never to hear it. He would have put the ocean between himself and the mocking tongues which would have insulted his grief. On the other side of the Atlantic he would make a

home for his mother and himself, where the name of the dead would not be aspersed in their hearing. But, happily, this ordeal was not before him.

Jessie had reached her destination so completely worn out by the discomforts of the journey, that had an immediate return been practicable, neither Doctor Forney nor Doctor Landford would have allowed it. But the roads even then were not in a condition to warrant a train going directly through, so for several days our travellers were the guests of the man whom it had been their mission to find in Kansas, and who entertained them with true Western hospitality.

This was now a thing of the past, and Jessie was home again ; but no one, with the exception of her uncle's immediate family, yet knew why she had taken this journey. Would she be at the meeting ? or was she too much disabled still from the hardships she had so lately endured to make her appearance in public ?

Speculation was rife over this matter, for it was known that only that afternoon friends calling to see her had failed to do so.

But it was not on account of any physical disability that Jessie had denied herself to visitors,

for she was in her accustomed seat when the meeting opened.

The minister and a stranger had entered the vestry together, followed by Mrs. Norberry and her niece. There had never been a larger attendance, for every seat was filled; and there were many in the audience who were seldom seen at a vestry or any other meeting.

The usual service of prayer, Scripture reading and singing were gone through with, and then the minister announced that the lesson for the evening would be found in The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, fourth chapter, thirty-first and thirty-second verses : —

“Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking be put away from you, with all malice :

“And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

The minister said there was as much need in our day to remember this injunction as when Paul gave it to the early church ; that itching ears and evil speaking was a sin in the church in all times. If men, and women too, were less ready to hear

and repeat what was often but the promptings of malice, the testimony of the recording-angel would bear less heavily against many a name. The Church would stand appalled, he thought, could it know how many reputations were pulled down and laid in the dust, lives shadowed, and their good turned to evil from this cause alone.

The apostle's charge seemed to be sadly disregarded by many who thought themselves Christian men and women. If our sins were forgiven as we forgive others, where should we stand in that great day when a wise and discriminating Judge should apportion us our deserts?

John Norberry closed the lesson by making a strong appeal to his people that they should put away from them everything that would hinder their growth in the Christian life, or cause them to be stumbling-blocks in the way of others.

Then, instead of dismissing the meeting, he went on to say, "Friends, I have shortened the exercises this evening in order that you may hear from a gentleman present who has something to say to you," introducing Doctor Landford, from Kansas.

This gentleman then rose and said: "Friends,

I have come here from my home in the far West to vindicate the fair name of an old friend who has been greatly misapprehended by you. Doctor Melville Carrol was for many years associated with me in my profession, and I was as familiar with his public and private life as it was possible for any one to be outside of his family. A better man or truer Christian I have never met. But I have learned within the last few weeks that he accused himself of a crime, with what foundation I leave you to judge when I shall have finished.

“I hold in my hand a letter which he wrote me some two years before his death, making, as he says, a confession. For some reason, which I do not understand, but which probably had its origin in a disordered mind, he did not wish me to receive it while he was living. But he left it in the hands of a friend in whom he had all confidence, and who promised to deliver it to me immediately upon his death.

“How faithfully that friend kept her promise you will see when I tell you that she travelled over sixteen hundred miles to put this letter in my hand, encountering one of the severest storms which has visited the Northwest for many years ; and in con-

sequence of which she endured hardships and privations almost unparalleled.

“Now,” continued Doctor Landford, “I will read my old friend’s letter to you, that you may know just what the charge is that he makes against himself :

DEAR OLD FRIEND :— When your eye falls upon these lines, I shall have rendered up my account at the bar of a just and merciful God. But I cannot go hence without making a confession which I hope may ease my burdened conscience. You will remember Mrs. Winter’s case. That unfortunate lady died by my hand, and not of the disease which her friends supposed.

You will recall our consultation over her case some weeks prior to her death, and the fact that the origin of her trouble baffled us ; since we were then unable to satisfactorily account for the attacks of distress from which she so frequently suffered.

I was called to her about ten o’clock on the night of her death, and found her in great pain. I administered, as I supposed, a remedy, which had in the past sometimes relieved her ; and soon afterward she became easy, and I took my leave.

But what was my surprise and consternation on reaching home to find on my study table the vial which I had laid out to take with me that evening — the quieting drug which I supposed I had just administered.

Instead I had given Mrs. W. five drops of a weak solution of cyanide of potash, which happened to be in my pocket at the time, I having put it there for a laboratory experiment.

I had no sooner realized my terrible mistake than word was

brought me of this lady's death. The drug had done its fatal work quickly.

I need not tell you that I passed a sleepless night, and was illy prepared for the post-mortem examination on the following day.

You will remember the attack of faintness to which I succumbed on that occasion, and which had the effect of removing me from my victim whom I never afterward saw, as an illness of weeks intervened before I got about again.

Doubtless, with other friends, you supposed me prostrated by over work and anxiety as I learned the verdict which you rendered on that occasion ; but whether you had any suspicion of the truth or not I do not know, as you never mentioned the matter to me. But I have sometimes thought you were aware of my guilty secret, for unhappily I kept my own counsel at the time and since.

Consideration for the family and friends who had no suspicion of my error caused me at first to keep silence ; and later the fact that the dear ones of my own household must suffer by such an avowal shut my lips.

Mrs. Winter was my last patient, for her death so preyed upon my mind as to unfit me for the duties of my profession ; and I at once gave up my practice and went abroad.

But in changing the place I did not change the pain, for I felt the brand of murderer was upon me, and nowhere could I forget my horrible secret.

On my return I moved to this quiet town, but even here the curse of my unacknowledged sin has followed me, and for years I have not known any peace of mind.

I have made this confession hoping to ease my burden which at times is greater than I can bear ; and I trust that He who knows the secrets of all hearts will accept this tardy avowal, and absolve me of my sin!

MELVILLE P. CARROL.

As Doctor Landford finished reading this letter there was scarcely a dry eye in the audience, and more than one sob was distinctly audible.

After a moment he went on: "Is there any one among us willing to take the responsibility of judging a fellow-creature who suffered so long and deeply for a mistake to which any one might have been liable? I think there is not a person in this audience but must feel that if Doctor Carrol was responsible for this lady's death, as he affirms, his after life was an atonement so far as a godly sorrow and repentance could make it so. But now I want to say that I am by no means sure that my poor friend was responsible in this case. For after I became satisfied that Mrs. Winter's death was not caused by cancer of the stomach, as her friends supposed, I made a farther autopsy, and the notes which I took at the time would bear out my opinion that death really resulted from organic heart disease complicated with congestion of the lungs.

"Had Doctor Carrol not been prostrated ere the autopsy was finished he might have been saved the years of sorrow and remorse which at times unsettled his reason.

"I think," Doctor Landford continued, "that

farther confirmation than my word will not be necessary, but I will say that I still have in my possession those notes, which are at the disposal of any one minded to see them."

As Doctor Landford sat down the minister arose, and proposed that a vote of thanks should be tendered the doctor for this service to their late fellow-townsmen, and that resolutions of sympathy and respect should be sent to the family of Doctor Carrol, whose memory would always be honored among them.

It is perhaps needless to add that a unanimous vote was at once taken in favor of both propositions.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DOCTOR FORNEY AT HOME.

WHY, Stephen Forney! Where in the world have you been?" This was the salutation the doctor met from his sister on his return from the Western trip which had taken him away so suddenly more than three weeks before.

Miss Forney had received no explanation of her brother's abrupt departure other than the brief telegram which had stated that he was called suddenly away from the city on business; and afterward a line which he had written at Rochester, saying he was on his way West, and she need not look for him under ten days.

"Did you not receive my telegram and letter?" he asked, with what his sister felt was exasperating coolness.

"Yes; but what did they tell me? They only said you were going; not why. You never were mysterious before, Stephen. Are you married?"

"Whatever made you think of that? Do you

suppose if I were married that I should come home without my wife? What put that into your head, Harriet?"

"You never went off in such a way before, and I know you did not go alone, for Mr. Kelsey saw you in the depot the night you left." Miss Forney was growing nervous under her brother's eye. "Of course if you had come home in a few days, as you said — what was I to think?"

"Did Mr. Kelsey tell you who was with me?" the doctor asked with an amused smile.

"No, he did not know the lady; but from his description I judged it must be Miss Jessie. I did not choose that he should think you had left me entirely in the dark as to your movements, and so I answered as if I knew all about it:

"O, yes! Miss Jessie Norberry. My brother and her father were great friends. Stephen is very fond of her for her father's sake, and has quite constituted himself her guardian when she is in town."

The doctor laughed, but evidently his sister's words had a little nettled him.

"You are right so far, Harriet, that my companion was Miss Jessie, but you do not pay my powers

of discernment a very high compliment when you attribute my regard for that young lady to my friendship for her father. But did you think Miss Jessie had done me the honor to run away with me?" he smilingly asked.

"What was I to think? You two had started off without telling any one of your intention or destination. Certainly your silence was very puzzling under the circumstances. You have been gone over a fortnight, and now that you are come home you beat about the bush and tell me nothing. Of course I saw the newspaper notice of your being on one of the snowbound trains, and that is all I have heard from you in the last fortnight."

"I am sorry to have given you needless anxiety, sister. I did not count on your seeing any such item, or I would have telegraphed you from St. Louis.

"The business that took me West was Miss Jessie's, and a private matter; but, Harriet, I have something to tell you." The doctor stopped a moment, as if considering how best to break his news to his sister, and then added:

"Though I did not come home a married man, as you seem to think I should," smiling, "I ex-

pect soon to be one, for Jessie Norberry has promised to be my wife. To-morrow I go to Newbury to ask her uncle's consent to our union ; and, Harriet, I hope after I bring her home we shall be able to make her happy here."

Evidently the doctor's home had suddenly acquired a new interest in his eyes, and for the next few moments he seemed to be taking a mental inventory of the rich and elegant appointments about him. Though not a man vain of his belongings, or given to rate them other than as mere accessories of his life, he felt that the most fastidious taste could scarcely find anything at fault in the externals of his home.

"I am glad, Stephen ; you deserve to be happy in your marriage, and I sincerely hope you will." The doctor would never know how much of an effort these few words of approval cost his sister, who had been entirely unprepared for this news, notwithstanding that she had suggested it.

Hereafter another would be first in her brother's heart — one whose right it would be to care for him and order his home. Her reign was over. This was the one thought that had stamped itself on her brain : she was to be deposed from her place.

Ten years before this would not have come so hard to her. Then, she had been used to think sometimes of her brother's marriage, and even to plan for it, resolving to go away herself and make her home with a maiden aunt who would have welcomed her. But now this relative was dead, and she had grown to look upon her brother's home as her own. Her nature was not superficial enough to bear changes kindly, and to go away now would be like tearing up her life by the roots.

It had always been held by her as a tenet of faith that if a husband and wife were to find happiness together they must start upon their married life alone. No third person should be a witness to the slight differences which are sure to arise between those of different temperaments and habits when brought into the close relations of marriage.

Since she was dependent upon her brother she would be obliged to stay and make that uncomfortable third person who would doubtless often find herself *dé trop*, for that she could leave him, she knew had never occurred to her brother, and if she did, where should she go?

He should never know what this renunciation of

her life cost her, for she felt it would be that, and his happiness should be her first consideration. She could not forget the light in his eyes which had seemed to irradiate his whole face when he told her that Jessie Norberry had promised to be his wife.

With her brother's choice she had no fault to find—in fact, she knew of no one she would rather see his wife, and she called herself jealous and selfish, adding nearly all the other unlovely qualities that she did not more heartily share her brother's happiness.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE TOO MANY.

THE minister's wife and Jessie were among the last to leave the vestry at the close of the meeting, and, on reaching the street, Mrs. Norberry remembered something she wished to say to the sexton, and stepped back, bidding Jessie wait for her a moment.

Her aunt had no sooner turned, than Jessie saw some one emerge from the shadow of the trees opposite and approach her. The next moment Milton Carrol had grasped her hand, and was saying hurriedly, —

“Miss Jessie, you have made me your debtor for life. But I have much to say to you. Shall I find you at home to-morrow?” His voice was hoarse with emotion, and Jessie felt thankful for the friendly darkness which covered her own confusion, for his sudden appearance had strangely disconcerted her.

“Yes; and I shall be happy to see you,” she managed to say calmly; then he was gone.

“I am thankful that justice has at last been done Doctor Carrol. I could never blame his wife for holding herself aloof from the people here as she always has, but I hope now she will be able to overlook the past and come among us. I am sure she will be very kindly received if she can bring herself to do so,” was Mrs. Norberry’s comment as she laid off her wraps that evening.

The feeling in the town toward the Carrols was a matter about which she had said little; but it had nevertheless greatly troubled her, and to-night she had been too much moved to lightly dismiss the matter.

“I wish,” she continued, “that Mr. Carrol had happened to be present at the meeting this evening, and witnessed the effect of his father’s letter; for it might have in a measure atoned for past coolness and suspicion.”

“He was at the meeting,” returned the minister, “and he seemed quite overcome, sitting with his head in his hand from the time Doctor Landford commenced speaking.” Milton Carrol was not in the habit of attending the evening meeting, and

it had not occurred to Jessie that he had been present on this occasion till he came and spoke to her.

"Yes," continued Mr. Norberry, "he came in late and took a seat near the door. I think very few in the vestry were aware of his being there. His presence was most opportune, certainly ; but I hardly understand how he happened to come this particular evening." The minister knew that he and Doctor Landford had not met, for the reason that Milton Carrol had only returned to Newbury late that afternoon, and could have had no inkling of what was to happen that evening.

"Humph ! If all the town were there, I don't know as you need wonder at his being," was Miss Norberry's response. That Milton Carrol had gone to this meeting solely to see her niece, she felt sure. She had been watching Jessie, and her peculiar powers of divination where her niece was concerned, made her certain that she had not only seen, but spoken with the doctor's son.

Miss Norberry was right in her surmise : that it was the hope of seeing Jessie that had taken him there. She had been so constantly in his thoughts for the last two weeks, that he found himself in-

voluntarily entering the vestry that night, since there was the possibility of meeting her there.

After learning the real service she had done his father by the long and perilous journey she had just made, he found himself unable to go home without in some way testifying his gratitude to her. Speak to her he must, and had he not found the opportunity to do so privately, he would have braved the gossips and done so more openly.

So intent was he upon this purpose, that he had for the moment entirely forgotten the man to whom he owed his father's vindication ; nor did he remember him again till he reached home, and found he had preceded him there.

Doctor Forney had been detained from going to Newbury the day following his return home ; and it so chanced that he was closeted with the minister in his study when Milton Carrol made his proposed call upon Jessie.

For some reason which she could not have defined, the latter had dreaded this interview with the doctor's son. That he sought it to thank her for her service to his father was obvious ; but that it foreboded an ordeal for herself, she felt sure.

And no sooner had she entered his presence

than her fears were, in part at least, explained, for she found herself at once under the masterful sway of an attraction she could not analyze.

She had known that his fine, generous nature would keenly appreciate what she had done, and it had occurred to her that she might find his gratitude embarrassing ; but she was entirely unprepared to find her act exalted into a grand and heroic deed.

For a moment she hardly realized that it was of herself he was speaking ; and then she could not at once find words in which to disclaim this fervid praise. It was on her lips to deny any right to such a tribute, when she found herself listening to an impassioned declaration of love. For a moment she sat as if entranced by these utterances ; but the passionate appeal, — “ My darling, you do love me a little ! Give me at least this assurance,” roused her. She started. What had she been doing ? She, the promised wife of another, listening to words like these !

“ Mr. Carrol, I have no right to hear, or you to speak such words to me. It must not be,” she said, raising both hands with a gesture as of putting away from her something which she feared, while

she came near giving utterance to the cry of her heart, — “It is too late!” The knowledge of a love which she now knew would have opened to her blessed possibilities of existence of which she had not dreamed, had indeed come too late. But though her lips did not give utterance to the cry which had sprung to them, the man standing opposite, understood with the prescience of love what the proud spirit was striving to conceal.

“You do not mean me to understand you are not free?” he cried. “You cannot act such a lie as to marry any one whom you do not love?” This passion had carried him out of himself, and for the moment he seemed a stern, accusing spirit.

“I have promised Doctor Forney I will be his wife, and I am as irrevocably bound as if the vows had been spoken which will unite me to him.”

If she had been announcing her death-doom she could hardly have done it more sadly than in assuring Milton Carrol that this promise was inviolable.

“And you tell me you will marry one whom you do not love?” came fiercely from the man contending with an emotion which well-nigh mastered him.

“You have no right to assume that,” Jessie

began, and faltered, "You do not know what I owe him. How kind and true a friend he has proved to me," she said tearfully.

"But, my darling, you must not do this thing. You cannot carry it out. If you were to try, it would only be to wreck three lives. You, who are the soul of purity and truth, could never so perjure yourself."

"Is there one code of honor for a man, and another for a woman?" she asked, steadying her nerves to speak calmly. "I have not taken this step hastily. It's more than two years since he first asked me to be his wife, and now I have promised, and I acknowledge no impediment to my marriage with him." This was said with a gentle dignity which carried to her hearer a conviction of her earnestness.

"But you must not try to keep that promise. It was prompted by gratitude—from a sense of indebtedness. No man worthy the name would be so base as to take advantage of a promise so given. Jessie, I cannot give you up. I have waited more than two years to tell you of my love. I would not ask you to be my wife while a stain rested upon my name. Believe me, this was my

only reason for not speaking." He attempted now to take in his own the hand which lay passively in her lap.

"Mr. Carrol," she said, rising, and putting the distance of several feet between them, while there was that in her manner which forbade a nearer approach, "I forbid you to speak to me in this way. I beg you will never again attempt it. And now, at the risk of seeming rude, I must ask that you leave me."

For a moment Milton Carrol stood looking at her, taking in every turn of the graceful figure, and dainty detail of dress, from the shining bands of hair held in place by a silver comb, to the slipper with which she was unconsciously tapping the carpet.

Jessie felt her cheek flush beneath his gaze. It was as if he were reading her inmost thoughts as he seemed to her to have the power of doing. She could not trust herself to speak again, though she knew he was waiting for some palliation of her dismissal.

"Since my presence seems to give you pain, I will go," he said gently; "but I take with me the assurance that you are not indifferent to me, and

that you will never be able to keep your promise to my rival."

Was Milton Carrol as confident of this last as he seemed? His words, at least, had that ring in them, and they produced a singular effect upon the girl to whom they were uttered, — whose face suddenly lighted up as a doomed man's might under the assurance of a reprieve.

While Milton Carrol was putting on his coat in the hall, Doctor Forney came out of the minister's study. Any one who had witnessed the meeting of these two men on this occasion would have been struck with the mutual surprise depicted on both faces. They had bowed, passed the compliments of the day, Mr. Carrol leaving the house as the doctor passed on to the family sitting-room from whence his rival had a moment before emerged.

The room was unoccupied now save by Allan, who had apparently just entered. The boy was disconsolately regarding a box which he held in his hand, but his face instantly lighted up on seeing the doctor.

"Your cousin is not here?" said the doctor, his tone a mixture of surprise and disappointment.

"No ; she went up-stairs. But say, do you know what the matter was ?" Allan asked.

"I was not aware of there being anything the matter," replied the doctor. "Did you say Miss Jessie was here a moment since ?" he asked, at a loss to understand why she had not kept her appointment with him.

She had promised to meet him here at the conclusion of his interview with her uncle, and she knew that his time was limited, as he had a lecture engagement that evening, and must return to the city by the five o'clock train. What did her absence mean ?

"Yes ; she was here when I came in, but she run right away, and I know she felt awful about something, 'cause she was crying. But say, can you fix this ? The wire has come unfastened, and it won't play a bit." Saying which, Allan put his music-box, of home-construction, into the doctor's hands.

Thus appealed to, Doctor Forney gave his attention to the disordered works, while Allan, satisfied in finding the assistance he had come to seek, turned interlocutor.

"Say, who were you talking with in the hall

just 'fore you came in?" he asked, watching the dexterous fingers among his works.

"I met Mr. Carrol going out. You may have heard me speak to him," was the doctor's reply.

"Whew! Has Mr. Carrol been here? What did he come for?"

"He did not tell me his business," returned the doctor, who nevertheless supposed that he knew Milton Carrol's errand.

What more natural than that he should wish to acknowledge his obligation to the girl who had rendered such a service to his dead father as well as to himself?

"I'll bet he and Cousin Jess had a quarrel. I couldn't see her face, but I know she was crying 'bout something," said Allan, impressed that he had arrived at the solution of the mystery; for his cousin leaving the room as suddenly as she had without any response to his plea for help, had puzzled him not a little.

"Guess she don't know what a awful lot of money he spent when she was out West, sending messages and things to find out about her. Papa said Mr. Carrol stayed all the time in the telegraph office, and kept somebody at work day and night

sending dispatches. He was almost crazy, he felt so bad 'cause he couldn't hear from her."

"Little boys should not repeat what they hear their elders say," interposed the doctor. "Miss Jessie had taken that journey on business for Mr. Carrol's father, and it was quite natural he should feel anxious about her, as all her friends did."

"Oh! but Mr. Carrol loves her, and means to marry her some day; and he will, too, for nobody can't get ahead of Mr. Carrol. I ain't telling tales now, for I never heard anybody say so, but I know some things that people don't tell me," said the boy, who was smarting under the reproof he had just received.

Did Allan suspect what his own errand had been? Was the boy cognizant of what had just transpired in his father's study? Certainly there was no malice in the cherubic face.

A moment later Allan was recounting the episode of the previous summer; and the fact that Milton Carrol had found his cousin, and brought her home after everybody else had given her up for dead, lost nothing in Allan's hands.

Thanks to the doctor's deft fingers and kindly interest, the music-box was now in order, and

when Allan left the room in high glee over his mended toy, his words were still ringing in the doctor's ears.

Was Allan right? Did Milton Carrol aspire to marry the girl who was so soon to be his own wife? Why had his call that afternoon so disturbed her? For that she had been disturbed was evident, since her little cousin could not have been mistaken. The boy was too keen, and too fond of Jessie to have been deceived in this matter.

Here was probably to be found the reason for her having failed to keep her appointment with himself. What had transpired between them to have brought about such a result?

At this moment the door opened, and Jessie entered the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

MISS NORBERRY'S LESSON.

HELEN NORBERRY had, perhaps, never in her life felt a greater sense of satisfaction than in the engagement of her niece to Doctor Forney. The darling wish of her heart was to be realized at last. Jessie would marry into a good old family, and go to live in a centre of culture and fashion, whither her aunt would of course accompany her, and become an important part of her household.

On her return Jessie had told her Aunt Helen just how matters stood between herself and the doctor, and this had proved all the salve necessary to heal that lady's wounded feelings.

On the afternoon of which we have made mention in the previous chapter, Miss Norberry was pacing the floor of her chamber in quite a perturbed state of mind. If she had been twenty years younger, and the suitor for her niece's hand

had been her own, she would hardly have felt more concerned ; for concerned she certainly was.

But not as to what was happening in the study ; all was sure to go well there. The doctor was evidently very much in earnest, and her brother would not be likely to demur at the brilliant match offered his orphan niece. If she could have felt as sure of Jessie herself, she would have had no fears ; but she knew that at the moment Milton Carrol was with her niece, and that their interview was of no ordinary import ; for several times the rich, earnest voice of the doctor's son had rung out in tones of passion not to be mistaken.

She knew when that interview ceased, and when Mr. Carrol left the house, and also that he and the doctor had met ; for no sound from below escaped her sharpened senses. At the same moment she was aware that her niece had come up-stairs and shut herself into her room.

Now she would know what had passed between her and Mr. Carrol, and why Jessie had not remained to see the doctor, who must at that moment be seeking her.

She stepped across the hall to her niece's door, but found that it was locked.

"Jessie, I wish to see you," she said peremptorily. A moment later the door was opened, but the expression of the girl's face startled her.

"Why ! what is the matter ?" she asked, thrown quite off her guard.

Jessie closed the door mechanically ere she answered. Then she said quietly, "Nothing is the matter, only that I have made a great mistake, and must bear the consequences." Her voice was so full of suppressed sorrow that for a moment her aunt was moved to sympathy ; but suddenly divining how matters stood, and remembering what was at stake, she said angrily,—

"Jessie Norberry, I am ashamed of you. This is no time for a weak indulgence of sentiment. Remember your obligations to Doctor Forney ; and that he is this moment waiting for you. Go down to him immediately, and do not disgrace yourself or your family by any exhibition of maudlin heroics for a man who is destitute alike of honor and courage, for Milton Carrol is both a knave and a fool."

In her anger lest the doctor's son should step in now to mar her plans, Miss Norberry had gone too far, and aroused a spirit as strong as her own.

Jessie turned upon her with the dignity of an insulted queen : —

“ Please remember you are speaking to my father's daughter, who is not likely to disgrace her blood. But I forbid you ever to allude to Mr. Carol again in that way, and I deny your right of authority over me in such a matter. I am no longer a child to submit to the coercion of my will. If I keep my promise to Doctor Forney it will be because I feel it right that I should do so ; though I know now that I ought never to have made it. And now if you have no further business with me, I prefer to be alone.”

That she was dismissed would not have counted with Miss Norberry, but she saw that Jessie's blood was up, and that she would only injure her cause by remaining.

“ When you see fit to apologize for this you can come to me, but I have no further advice to offer to such a headstrong girl ;” and Miss Norberry quitted the room with a semblance of wounded feeling.

Ten minutes later Jessie went down to the doctor, outwardly calm, at least.

When Doctor Forney left the parsonage an hour

later, his marriage with Jessie Norberry had been arranged to take place early in the spring. She had yielded to his wishes in naming an early day, and had been her own sweet, gracious self throughout their interview ; but, nevertheless, the doctor had missed something which he had anticipated.

Marriage, to be sure, was a serious matter, looked at from a philosophical point of view, but was it usual for a girl of Jessie's years and temperament to so regard it? If she loved him as a woman should love the man she had promised to marry, would she have misgivings about making him happy? There had been something pathetic in the way she had responded to his declaration of unbounded faith in her ability to do so.

Had she really shrunk from all reference to their future together, or had he imagined it? She had fallen in with all his plans without dissent or suggestion. To his proposal of a foreign tour she had acquiesced, as she had to everything else, without any evidence of its giving her pleasure ; in fact, throughout their interview she had shown a gentle submissiveness which, as he thought of it now, he could but feel was foreign to his nature. What did it mean? It was not till he recalled what had

passed between them that these thoughts presented themselves. While he had been with her he had missed nothing, for the effluence of his own love had made him oblivious to all else.

But now that these thoughts had suggested themselves they troubled him, and he found himself unable to shake off the impression they left. It must be all his imagination, since Jessie had voluntarily promised to marry him after having had months to consider the matter. Her apparent coldness must be attributable to girlish modesty. When she was his wife she would be fond and loving as he believed it her nature to be. Still the serpent had entered his Eden. Doubt and mistrust would assail him, strive as he might to put them away.

Miss Forney watched her brother anxiously after his return from Newbury, and it was very evident to her that his happiness was not without alloy, though he gave no hint that everything was not as he wished.

Did he begin to have doubts about the step he was taking, now that everything was settled? Was it only a natural regret for the bachelor life he was leaving behind him?

They had been very happy, and now, of course, everything would be changed. Did this girl who was so soon to be her brother's wife appreciate what she had won? Miss Forney felt that it would be comparatively easy to give him up to one who did, but in the opposite case—well, she could not calmly contemplate such an issue.

She would soon have an opportunity to see them together, and then she would be able to judge for herself, for Jessie was coming up to buy her wedding clothes, and would spend a day or two with them.

"Have you been ill?" the doctor asked anxiously, when he met Jessie at the station.

She flushed slightly under his gaze, and somewhat reassured by her more natural color as well as her declaration that she was perfectly well, he presently lost sight of this fear in his pleasure at seeing her again. Had he been less absorbed in her he would have noted a pair of dark eyes sternly watching them both.

Though Jessie did not raise her own, she was conscious of these eyes being upon her, and the unusual pallor of her face which had alarmed the doctor, had been due to this fact.

Milton Carrol had come up to the city on the same train with herself, and though they had only exchanged nods, his presence had disturbed Jessie not a little. It was the first time she had seen him since their interview recorded in the last chapter ; and though they had not spoken, she had known that his eyes were constantly upon her.

That his trip to the city was an impromptu one, first decided upon when he saw her alight from her uncle's buggy at the station, she felt sure ; and that his sole purpose in coming was that he might exercise a surveillance over her movements.

It was as if this man had fettered her will ; and what disturbed her more was, that she found herself yielding to his dominant spirit. Now that she had met him again all the barriers she had been striving to put between herself and him had become as naught. Would she be able to hold steadily to the course she had marked out as her only honorable one ?

It was a week later when, going one afternoon to the opera with the doctor, she encountered Milton Carrol again.

Something in the performance had provoked a stinging satire from her companion, at which she

had laughed heartily, when, happening to look up, she encountered Mr. Carrol's eyes fixed upon her.

The doctor saw the change which instantly came over her face, and glancing in the direction her eye had taken, he was enlightened as to what had so affected her. Nor did it escape him that from this moment Jessie was apparently unconscious of the performance, though she did not again look in Mr. Carrol's direction.

On leaving the theatre, they found that it was raining hard, and as their carriage was not to be seen, the doctor left Jessie for a moment to look for it. But he had no sooner done so than she felt a hand laid upon her arm, and, looking up, met the appealing eyes of the man whom she had felt was near her.

"My darling, this struggle is killing you. Break these hateful bonds and be free. You do not suffer alone, for I have been in torment the last fortnight, and the man for whom you are sacrificing yourself is far from happy. Fate is too strong for you — you cannot —"

Milton Carrol was prevented from finishing his sentence by the approach of the doctor whom he did not care to meet, and with a courteous good-

day, he turned away without having won from Jessie any recognition of his presence.

The impassioned manner in which he was addressing her had not escaped the doctor, nor was he misled by Mr. Carrol's leave-taking to believe that his words had been of ordinary import such as any one might exchange with a friend.

"The carriage is close by now. I think Tom was asleep, as he had not even fallen into line. I hope you were not subjected to annoyance through my leaving you," the doctor added as Jessie did not respond.

"O, no! Mr. Carrol came and spoke to me; perhaps you saw him," she said.

"Yes," was the brief reply, and the next moment the doctor was carefully shielding her from the rain as she crossed the sidewalk to the waiting vehicle.

They were nearly home when Jessie spoke of her intention to go back to Newbury on the morrow, as she had overstayed the time which she had set to her friends.

"I am sorry you cannot spend another day with us. Harriet is calculating upon your doing so, and as for myself, I feel as if I had almost been de-

frauded of my rights, I have seen so little of you." Jessie submitted to the pressure which was a caress of the hand the doctor had taken.

"I will do better when I come again. You shall have no reason to complain of being defrauded of your rights," she said gently, adding, "if we could but go back to Greek simplicity, one need not be such a slave to one's dressmaker and modiste ; but I suppose I must not be quite a guy, as you might have something to say about that."

"As if you could be a guy, wear what you would," returned the doctor gallantly, as the carriage drew up at Mrs. Wilson's door.

A moment later he had bidden her good-night, with the benediction, "May the angels keep you, my child," and the light kiss he left upon her forehead seemed to Jessie a fitting supplement to his words.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RELEASE.

STEPHEN, are you quite sure that this marriage is to be for your happiness? Forgive me for asking the question, but you have not seemed like yourself of late, and I cannot help feeling that something is troubling you."

The doctor was sitting, preoccupied, before his desk, where he had seated himself half an hour before, ostensibly for work; but though he had taken his pen in his hand, he had attempted nothing. As his sister spoke, he turned quickly, and a slight flush came into his pale, intellectual face.

"My marriage with Jessie Norberry, Harriet, will probably never take place. It was a mistake, my thinking to bind her to me, and I have determined to give her back her freedom." The doctor spoke quietly, but his sister saw the passion that lay behind his words.

"No," he resumed, "I have been indulging in a wild, boyish dream, and the sooner it is forgotten

the better. To realize this dream has been my hope for the last two years, and I acknowledge that it has been hard to give it up. Jessie Norberry is herself aware that she would not find her highest happiness as my wife, though her sense of honor would hold her to the promise she made me. I have seen to-day what convinces me not only that her heart has never been mine, but that it is given to another ; and since she will not break her bonds, I must do it for her."

As if he had been bracing himself to this effort, the doctor began at once using the pen in his hand upon the paper which lay before him. A few moments later his sister stole from the room, that her exit might not disturb him, sure that he would not miss her. It was late in the night when she heard him come up the stairs, and as he was not the man to draw back from what he felt was his duty, she knew he had not sought his pillow till that fateful letter had been written which contained the renunciation of his hopes.

Before Jessie had been two hours at home the doctor's letter was put into her hands, and though she had striven to hide her emotion on reading it, her Aunt Helen who was present, detected it.

"What is the trouble? From whom is your letter?" she asked, noting the changing color with which the girl had scanned its pages.

For answer, she arose, and, putting it into her aunt's hands, quitted the room.

"Jessie Norberry, you are a fool," was that lady's very decided ejaculation as she took in the purport of the letter. Then, reading the words aloud which had so raised her ire against her niece, — "'I give you up to him whom you love, and who is better fitted than I to make you happy,' — Yes, Milton Carrol with his crazy blood is of course a better mate for her, since they will be two lunatics well matched," was the irate rejoinder.

"I might have expected it," she added sadly, a moment later, knowing now that all her planning and scheming had been in vain. "Jessie never did appreciate her blood. I shall let her know what I think of her playing fast and loose in this way, and with such a man as the doctor, too." Here Miss Norberry picked up the letter which had fallen from her hand, and resumed her reading.

"That every blessing which life can bring may attend you, is the prayer of him who will never

forget his lost love.' She deserves it," was Miss Norberry's comment when she had finished, but she did not allude to the blessing which the writer had called down upon the head of his lost love; for, notwithstanding the language in which this letter was couched, the angry woman only saw in it the rejection of her niece's hand.

Doubtless at the moment Miss Norberry meant what she said in declaring her intention to do battle for the doctor, but evidently she thought better of it, for the only notice she took of her niece's broken engagement was to put out of sight at once all the preparations she had been making toward her trousseau.

Perhaps she had not forgotten Jessie's avowed determination to be guided only by her own judgment in this matter. At least her good sense had shown her that nothing was to be gained by her interference, since the doctor had put it out of her power to plot or scheme further for this marriage.

Milton Carrol seemed likely to win in spite of the heavy stakes she had played against him, and probably she saw that the part of wisdom was to make no further opposition.

But meanwhile how was Jessie taking her re-

lease? On reading the doctor's letter she was suddenly conscious of losing a great burden, but only to find that another was substituted in its place.

Why had it been ordained that she should win a love which she had neither appreciated nor been able to return? When the fact had first come home to her consciousness that the man whom she had promised to marry had never called out the wealth of affection of which she was capable, and that another had done so, in the revulsion of feeling toward him it had seemed impossible to keep her promise.

But there were her obligations to the doctor, more binding to one of Jessie's nature than all the dictates of inclination. Had she not accepted from him services which she would ill requite were she to prove false in keeping her promise to him? She could not break faith with the doctor after what had passed. No; a thousand times no! Better sacrifice her own happiness than to prove recreant to honor and principle.

She had found her only solace in the thought that the doctor would never know he had not been first in her heart; for she had determined to do her whole duty as his wife.

But this sudden release had shown her the precipice upon which she had been standing, and how specious had been such arguing, since she would have been no true wife, however religiously her marriage vows had been kept.

This girl had a large share of that martyr-spirit with which so many women are endowed, and once having brought herself to feel it was her duty to marry the doctor, it had seemed comparatively easy. But now that her reprieve had come, she could not be glad in it. What would she not have sacrificed now to have saved the doctor the disappointment and chagrin to which she had unwittingly subjected him !

She was suffering a kind of mental torture now that she could not save from all unpleasant consequences of her mistake, the man who had called out her highest esteem, if not love.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WAITING.

MILTON CARROL'S desire to see and speak with Jessie on the night of the meeting had made him for the moment forget that the man who had travelled over sixteen hundred miles to vindicate his father's name, deserved some recognition at his hands.

In leaving the vestry there had been an undefined purpose in his mind to make himself known to his father's defender, and insist upon taking him to Elm Brook Farm ; but Doctor Landford had gone clear out of his mind as he saw Jessie and her aunt step upon the sidewalk.

Our readers are familiar with what followed. After those few words spoken in the shadow of the vestry, Milton Carrol had turned and walked quickly in the direction of home, his thoughts intent upon the singular developments of the evening, and the coming interview on the morrow with Jessie.

So he was not a little surprised on entering the family sitting-room to find his mother in conversation with his father's old friend, who had not waited for his invitation to Elm Brook Farm, but had preceded him there.

Mrs. Carrol was taken entirely by surprise when Doctor Landford was ushered into her presence; for this was her first intimation that he was in town.

The unexpected meeting with this friend of former years had called up so many memories that for a few moments she had been too much overcome for the doctor to introduce the matter which had brought him to Newbury, though he was just doing so when her son entered.

"I was just telling your mother that I have a letter written by your father to me sometime before his death, which I think you would both like to see," Doctor Landford said after greeting the son of his old friend.

"Yes, I was at the meeting to-night and heard you read that letter; and words would but poorly express the gratitude I feel for your kindness," Milton Carrol said, with a hearty grasp of their visitor's hand.

“Mother,” he said now, turning to her, “prepare yourself for an explanation of all that was mysterious in my father’s life ; for this letter, and what our good friend can tell us of the circumstance, clears up what has heretofore been inexplicable to us.”

Doctor Landford passed the letter to him, and Milton Carrol read aloud while tears were coursing down his mother’s cheeks. When he had finished, the doctor repeated substantially the explanation he had given before the meeting.

“It is strange,” said Milton Carrol when he had finished, “that my father should have kept this from us. He talked of it frequently when he was not himself, but never as a mistake ; and we were unable to gather from his utterances, how the affair happened, or whose death it was of which he accused himself. This accounts,” he continued, “for his being so overcome when he met Mr. Winter at the Glen, the husband of the unfortunate lady.”

“I am sure Doctor Carrol even at that time could not have been himself, to have made such a mistake, since he was the most careful of men. I can easily see how his scrupulous conscientious-

ness should afterward magnify it into a crime," Mrs. Carrol said feelingly.

"Yes ; and it was most unfortunate he should never have learned that his mistake did not really cause his patient's death, since such an assurance would have saved him many hours of sorrow and self-accusation," returned his son.

"We physicians oftener have the issues of life and death in our hands than other men, and could we all be as exempt from our mistakes as your father, we should do well," was Doctor Landford's response.

It was late before Mrs. Carrol or her son would hear to their friend leaving them ; nor would they have consented to his doing so that night, but that his baggage was at the parsonage where they would be looking for him, as he was to leave Newbury early in the morning.

On the following day Milton Carrol had made the call on Jessie which we have previously recorded. How that interview ended our readers are aware.

While declaring with so much apparent certainty that she would not be able to keep her promise to his rival, down deep in his heart was the convic-

tion that the spirit which had prompted her to brave so much of danger and physical discomfort to keep her word in the simple matter of delivering a letter, would exact the fulfilment of her bond even to the sacrificing of herself.

It was this belief which sent him to the city on the occasion of her going up to buy her wedding clothes. The desire to save her from the exactions of an overscrupulous conscientiousness made him cognizant of her every movement during all these tedious shopping tours, and interviews with dress-makers and modistes, in which she had never been alone.

The only chance he had found to speak with her in all that week had been in the theatre vestibule when he had begged her to break her bonds and be free. That she was suffering was evident to him, and the fact well-nigh tortured him.

Had Miss Norberry seen him that night when he rushed out in the rain forgetful of the fact that he was in evening dress, she would have had some reason to believe him subject to attacks of lunacy, as she had often declared was the case.

He was aware of Jessie's leaving the city the following day, and he had hoped much from her

doing so. Knowing that she had returned to Newbury, he breathed more freely; for, notwithstanding that she kept herself invisible to him, it was a satisfaction to know that she was not with his rival.

The sense of security which he felt in her being at home was short-lived, however; for scarcely a fortnight had elapsed when he heard what, for the moment, nearly took his breath away.

Three days before, she had left for New York, whence she was to sail for Europe. In fact she had gone abroad with her Aunt Wilson. No lisp of any such intention on her part had gotten out in the town, and she was already on the ocean ere it was known in Newbury.

What did it mean? Had she indeed broken her engagement with Doctor Forney? It must be that this was the case, for they were to have been married in the spring.

Milton Carrol's heart gave a great leap, and his first impulse was to follow and claim his love; but a calmer second thought showed him that Jessie had gone away now to avoid him. He would be patient and wait, since she had broken her bonds; in the near future his love would return to him.

Possessing a thoroughly healthy nature he did not give himself up to vain longings for a sight of the face which would have so blessed his vision ; nor did he turn aside from any of the prosaic duties which just now made up his life. With the care of settling up his father's estate, and looking after his farm, he had little time for brooding over Jessie's absence, while a fair sweet presence sweetened every duty, so constantly was she with him in his thoughts.

It was in November that she had gone away, and when the loveliness of spring was abroad in the land, he thought of her wandering among the beauties of the Tyrol ; and when the scorching heats of summer parched the country side he remembered that she was looking down from her altitude among the Alps upon green valleys where a perpetual irrigation made such an arid condition impossible. But the winter and another spring rolled away, and still she did not come.

In boating his hay up river on a fair August night, Milton Carrol found himself strangely haunted by remembrances of that night two years before when Jessie had been his companion on a like trip.

The same sweet, wistful eyes seemed to be again looking at him from the bow of the boat. How insensate he had been on that occasion. Why had he not spoken then? Had he done so, this weary separation might have been averted. Was it some subtle, spiritual communication which came to him across the intervening waters? So near to him did his love seem at that moment, that he uttered the words of tender endearment which sprang to his lips.

It was only two days later that business took him to the city, and whom should he meet in the station but the fair personation of all his thoughts. Jessie in her young bright beauty stood before him. Their eyes met, and the next moment he was holding a soft little hand which closed with a firm pressure on his own.

Their greeting over, inquiries followed, and Milton Carrol learned that Jessie had landed two days before (the very hour when she had seemed so near him) and that she was now on her way to Newbury.

Whatever his business had been, he at once forgot that he had any other than to accompany her there.

A railroad train is, perhaps, not the most desirable place in the world for the exchanging of lovers' vows, but probably worse places have been utilized for such a purpose. It was certainly soon settled between the couple who had taken a rear seat in the car that they were to be one instead of two hereafter.

"I have waited patiently for you, my darling, but I will never let you go from me again," was Milton Carroll's passionate utterance, followed by the declaration, "You are mine now, and I shall make no delay in asserting my claims, lest you escape me again."

"Remember this is a free country," was Jessie's laughing response. "If you attempt to put me in bonds I can appeal to the law. But do not fear that I shall again run away from you," she added, with grave sweetness. "I am satisfied with wandering over the face of the earth, — home will be dearer to me than ever before."

"The only bonds I will put upon you are those of love, but they will hold you very tightly," returned the fond lover, "and I want you should wear your fetters at once, for I shall never feel sure of you till you have given yourself to me."

"I suppose you can claim your own when and where you like," said Jessie archly, adding a moment later, — "If you want so uncertain a blessing as myself you have only to take me, since the doctor would not."

Milton Carrol would probably have interpreted this permission very literally if such a proceeding would not have had spectators; as it was, he was obliged to content himself with raising to his lips the hand which was folded tenderly in both his own.

A few months later there was a quiet wedding in the parsonage, for Jessie wanted no display in her marriage, and only a few friends were present to wish the wedded pair joy on the journey which inaugurated their honeymoon.

Mrs. Carrol, a few weeks later, gave her new daughter a mother's welcome, and at once resigned her place as mistress of Elm Brook Farm to her son's wife. This marriage was the fulfillment of a hope she had long cherished.

Jessie had always been a great favorite among her uncle's parishioners, and she seemed not to have lost a whit of their esteem in her marriage; for she had no sooner settled down in her husband's

home, than Elm Brook Farm became the most popular house in the town. Somehow, too, the people of Newbury suddenly awoke to the fact that the doctor's widow was a great acquisition to the place. The minister had for some time found in Mrs. Carrol his most efficient ally, and he was always sure of her assistance in every good work.

Since her husband's death she had gone more into society, where she had soon made many friends, and ere long her voice was often heard in the evening meetings.

It was an innovation in Newbury for a woman to speak at these gatherings for praise and prayer, but John Norberry had urged this gifted lady to do so; and certainly no one had found cause for offense in the sweet, Christian teaching which fell from her lips. In fact, her noble, exemplary life came to be the standard of womanly excellence in the town.

We will take a peep at Jessie ten years after her marriage. Her home is no longer in Newbury, though she still spends her summers there.

Her husband has some time since been called to a position which necessitates his passing most of his time at the nation's capital; and here he has

his family with him ; for he feels that life is much too short for frequent separations from his dear ones.

So Jessie has come to regard Washington as her home, where she spends the greater part of the year, and where her children are growing up around her.

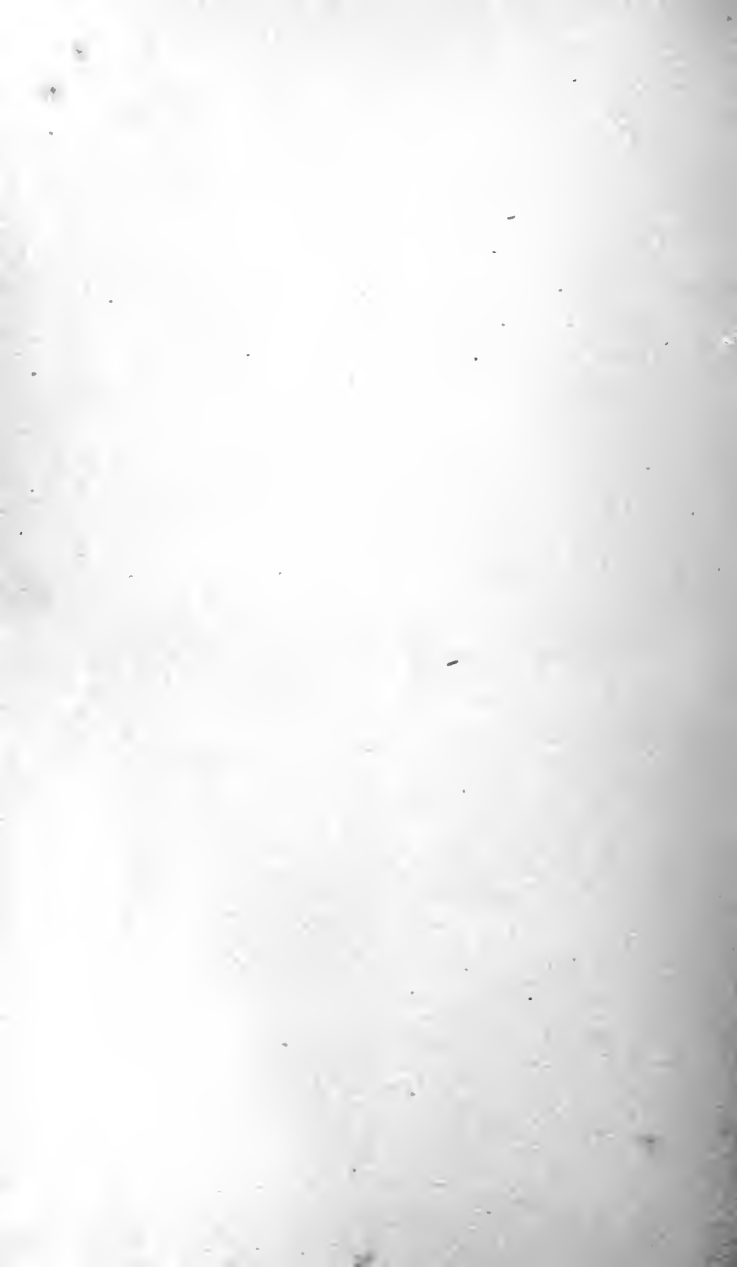
In her beautiful home she often receives the first people of the country, but among her most welcome guests are Doctor Forney and his sister, whom she counts among her warmest friends, and who seldom allow a year to pass without making her a visit.

Miss Forney when seeing Jessie's sweet matronly ways, and her gentle, loving manner of managing her children, often thinks with a sigh of what might have been, while the doctor seems to have transferred the love he bore the mother to her children, who think there is nobody in the world quite so good as "Uncle Stephen."

Miss Norberry has changed her opinion somewhat in regard to Jessie's marriage ; for now that lady often speaks with no little pride of,—“My niece, the Honorable Mrs. Milton Carrol.

Young Mrs. Carrol's beauty, grace, and unaf-

fectured manners have won appreciation even in high places ; but she is never so happy in the brilliant city life where she truly reigns a queen, as when with her little family she goes in the early spring to old Newbury, and settles down to the quiet, rural life which always had so great a charm for her.







A 000 131 393 1

